



## **Strategic Plan of the Society of Environmental Journalists**

**SEJ 3.0  
2014 – 2015**

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## **Strategic Plan of the Society of Environmental Journalists**

### **SEJ 3.0** 2014 – 2015

**Mission:** To strengthen the quality, reach and viability of journalism across all media platforms, to advance public understanding of environmental issues.

**Vision:** Credible and robust journalism that informs and engages society on environmental issues.

### **Overview on Strategy and Action Plans**

SEJ will address its mission and vision through effective programs designed by and for journalists who provide environmental coverage. Benefits and opportunities of programs and membership will be extended to journalists on varied beats, to students and all those who will be expanding and defining the field in years to come.

SEJ will develop new initiatives to:

- educate on emerging issues and beat basics;
- protect freedom of information on environment-related issues;
- build bridges between scientists and journalists;
- foster peer communication and networks of credible sources;
- provide recognition of excellence and support for media projects; and
- provide vision and leadership for the field through strategic partnerships.

Activities will include comprehensive annual conferences, Web site, print and electronic publications, social media news feeds, regional events, Freedom of Information WatchDog Project, awards of excellence, mini-grants for winning projects, diversity projects and creative partnerships of varied descriptions.

### **Organizational Background**

The Society of Environmental Journalists is a lively educational community of professional journalists, educators and students throughout the US, Canada and 27 other countries. SEJ was founded in 1990 by a small group of award-winning reporters, editors and producers from key news organizations in the United States. It's grown to be the world's oldest and largest organization of professional environmental journalists and the only one based in North America. SEJ is independent and nonpartisan. The group began as a self-help grassroots organization dedicated to "enhancing the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental news reporting." SEJ members of succeeding years have maintained that identity and focus.

Investment in the SEJ network has a proven ripple effect. SEJ members generate reports in every form of news media on a daily basis through social media, print, broadcast and online outlets. SEJ members recruit colleagues to interconnect, educate and empower high quality

public service journalism on environmental issues. The organization promotes innovation and development of new infrastructure for expanding and adapting the beat, to expand its reach and impact.

## **Problems Addressed**

*“It’s how you know”*

— Advertising slogan of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

Scholars have documented that media coverage makes or breaks environmental literacy in our society. Communities face an urgent need for greater understanding of environmental science and policy issues. As threats to peace, social stability and healthy ecosystems loom, the need for a growing environmental knowledge base — at local, national and global levels — has never been greater.

At the same time, we are witnessing profound technological and economic change in the way news is gathered and disseminated. Media companies have consolidated, eliminated editorial staff and slashed budgets for time and travel for original reporting. Reports from credible sources become indistinguishable from disinformation and campaign communication from special interests. Accurate news reporting on environmental issues loses ground just as many issues threatening the future health of ecosystems and communities grow more urgent.

History has shown the power of strong investigative, explanatory and public service journalism. Many changes in environmental policy and human behavior have been prompted or furthered by in-depth coverage from independent credible sources. Media attention often makes the critical difference in business decisions, public policy, activism, regulatory enforcement, and choices made by individuals, families and communities. When people do not learn about environmental issues, those issues are simply ignored, and probabilities for positive change are severely diminished.

We know from long experience that when news organizations buck the trend and do a stellar job covering environment, this happens because individual journalists and editors made that happen. They were informed, motivated, and empowered to do it. Journalists come to and contribute to SEJ conferences, for unique learning opportunities and long-term leadership for this field. They turn to SEJ for help developing knowledge, skills, and confidence. They expect SEJ to help them understand how to use the Freedom of Information Act, to speak out on FOI issues, and fight agency transparency battles side by side.

The result of this work: Strong investigative, explanatory and public service journalism, from independent credible sources, capable of prompting change in policy and behavior.

## **Organizational Effectiveness and Sustainability**

Over coming years, SEJ will develop revenue streams according to board policy, to underwrite programs and operations that meet a quadruple bottom line. All SEJ activities will be:

- Highly valued by journalists and others in SEJ’s larger community of interest who care about public understanding of environmental issues;

- High impact toward highly valued outcomes for *journalists* and *journalism*;
- Sustainable program-related income is associated with the activity; and
- Sustainable gift and grant income is associated with the activity.

We define SEJ's dual strategic position as the *ultimate resource for journalists who cover environment-related issues* and *change agent for more and better environmental journalism*.

We affirm the purpose of all SEJ programs and services is to:

- Build a stronger, better-educated, and more closely connected network of journalists who are reporting on environment-related issues; and
- Improve and increase news coverage of critically important environmental issues across all media platforms, to inform and engage all communities.

## **Imperatives**

SEJ must build and maintain its membership.

SEJ must provide opportunities for member-to-member engagement and communication on topics of professional interest.

SEJ must provide members and other journalists with opportunities for cutting-edge learning and career development on environmental topics and best practices in journalism.

SEJ must cultivate relationships that help enhance the quality, credibility, reach and viability of environmental journalism and that help build the organization.

SEJ must generate and maintain the financial and organizational resources to achieve its mission and objectives in both the short and long term.

## **Constituencies for SEJ's Work**

Primary constituency: Current members and any media professional or academic who qualifies for membership according to SEJ bylaws.

Other constituencies: News sources and others, including the general public, who are important to the potential quality, accuracy, reach and viability of environmental journalism.

## **Notes on Strategic Directions for SEJ Board Attention and Organizational Activity**

### *Membership*

- Increase efforts to retain current members
- Attract and activate early-career journalists

- Engage members with each other
- Motivate volunteerism and build leadership for future of the organization
- Increase diversity within SEJ membership and for environmental coverage

### *Finance and Fundraising*

Maximize revenue streams within SEJ financial policies (see <http://www.sej.org/about-sej/financial-policies>), namely:

- Earned income through dues, conference fees, advertising revenues, subscriptions
- Foundation grants – unrestricted
- Foundation grants – restricted to project, with project grant to include indirect costs up to 15% as permitted by the funder
- Unrestricted gifts from any source up to \$15,000
- Media company and university sponsorship of the annual conference
- National Science Foundation grants or grants from other government agencies that exist solely to underwrite education, humanities, arts and cultural activities
- Endowment spending policy per board decision at the time of budget approval each January

### *Events, Programs and Publications*

Each year, review, develop, and offer a robust roster of programs, matched with adequate resource base for the year, including:

- Annual Conferences.
  - Support project staff, volunteer conference chair(s), moderators and tour leaders to develop and refresh conference agendas, to build skills, cover emerging issues, bring journalists and scientists together, and generally respond to needs and interests of members.
  - Identify future conference sites and develop appropriate partnerships and underwriting plans for each conference.
  - Fine tune the conference business model, to insure a sustainable program while honoring board policy on funding sources for SEJ activities.
- SEJ Publications, including Web site, e-mail, social media and print distribution.
  - Affirm a matrix of purposes and objectives for current and potential SEJ publications.
  - Match these with media platform and financial resources adequate for paid editorial personnel and non-personnel costs involved.
- Regional Events.
  - Emphasize volunteer meet-ups.
  - Develop fully funded training and tour events when possible, along lines described above under “Annual Conferences.”

- Fund for Environmental Journalism mini-grants, to underwrite certain costs of reporting projects, selected through a competitive process.
- SEJ Awards for Reporting on Environment, to recognize excellence in multiple categories.
- Mentoring Program, pairing mentor volunteers with less experienced colleagues.
- Freedom of Information WatchDog project, to monitor, report and act on right-to-know issues, to speak out and negotiate on right-to-know issues, especially at EPA.
- Members-only listservs, to provide for discussion, resource sharing and help on deadline.
- Freelance directory, discussion listserv and specialized workshops to support and connect independent journalists.
- Initiatives to increase diversity in environmental journalism.
- Initiatives to engage and meet needs for educators and students of environmental journalism.
- Strategic partnerships and creative projects to address “reach” issues for environmental journalism, to increase its visibility, stature and impact.
- Marketing efforts to increase participation in SEJ programs and to promote environmental journalism generally.

#### *Governance, Human Resources and Leadership Development*

- Attention to leadership development, identifying and advancing key volunteers to board service, and encouraging board leaders to take officer positions.
- Retain key staff but lay a solid groundwork for succession in all positions.

#### **Allocation of SEJ’s Capacity**

Where do we invest financial and human resources? Answer: Where necessary to provide highest value core activities:

- Staff time and direct expense of maintaining an exclusive paid membership and governance structure per bylaws.
- Staff time and direct expense of Web site, listserv system, social media accounts and feeds, and other means of interconnection and communication with SEJ members and other constituencies.
- Staff time and direct expense of training activities that support members in doing their best work.
- Staff time and direct expense of activities that foster more and better public service environmental journalism.

#### **Strategic Partnerships**

SEJ will pursue appropriate strategic partnerships to advance shared goals. These can be updated year to year. Recent examples include support for expedition-style learning, working

with the *Institute for Journalism and Natural Resources*. SEJ has worked often with the *Knight Center for Environmental Journalism* at Michigan State University, most recently on a series of workshops for journalists and scientists to improve public communication on climate change. SEJ recruits participation by the *Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting* for conference sessions and we are pleased to help promote Metcalf resources. SEJ has a current partnership with the *Fund for Investigative Journalism* to provide environment-focused FIJ grantees with mentors and membership. SEJ develops panel sessions when invited by *Investigative Reporters and Editors*. Partners for international projects include *The Woodrow Wilson Center for International Studies*, *Earth Journalism Network (a project of Internews)* and the *Trans-Atlantic Media Project of the Center for Strategic and International Studies*. On freedom of information issues SEJ works side by side with the Society of Professional Journalists, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, National Association of Science Writers, and others.

### **Indicators of Success**

SEJ recognizes success when, through our work, journalists are better connected, educated and empowered to create and deliver environmental news reports that engage readers, viewers and listeners on key issues. We will look for indicators of success through number and caliber of members and trends of volunteerism; participation in conferences and other activities; entries received for Awards, FEJ mini-grants and fellowship opportunities; Twitter and Facebook followers; and readership of SEJ publications. We will survey members to understand what elements of SEJ programs and services are most highly valued and put to use, and we strive to increase those elements. We will survey to gauge impact of conference events and on attendees' knowledge base and for the impact of their own work. We analyze Web site and social media traffic including discussions shared member-to-member on SEJ email listservs. We will collect news clips generated or informed by SEJ programs or services and anecdotal feedback from journalists, scientists and others who participate in SEJ programs on the role SEJ plays in the impact of their own work and careers.

Success or shortfall in attracting gifts, grants and earned income from individuals and organizations interested in SEJ's community and its mission will provide another indicator of relevance and effectiveness. SEJ is often approached by diverse organizations seeking partnership and synergy to advance mutual goals. This trend will provide another indicator of success.

### **Commitment to Strategic Planning: An Iterative Approach**

The Board, Staff and Members of the Society of Environmental Journalists believe that organizational strategy must evolve as changes externally in our field, and internally for SEJ, come along. We will respond affirmatively to change, revisit core principles and adjust plans accordingly, to continue serving SEJ's mission with the strength and focus it deserves.