SPJ GOVERNANCE - OVERVIEW

A recent proposal to shrink the size of SPJ's board reignited a decades-long discussion regarding the Society's overall governance structure. Although the recent measure failed because of some specific issues, leadership agreed that there is merit to the idea of a smaller board.

In an effort to investigate the idea, President Paul Fletcher created a task force, to be led by Region 4 Director Patti Gallagher Newberry. I was asked to "survey the landscape" in an effort to provide background and context to the task force and Executive Committee.

Before the most recent discussion, however, I had already spent the past several months researching governance strategies and structures in the association realm. I, like many leaders, see major challenges created by our current model. My hope was to find some solutions.

This research goes beyond board structures, however. It includes all governance entities: boards, committees, delegates and membership. I've attended webinars, in-person training, read multiple books and spoke with association experts and other executive directors (inside journalism and out).

These memos are intended to share what I have learned, helping the Society's leadership create a path for optimum governance. It is not intended to offer specific solutions to every issue. Rather, it is intended to be a conversation starter for the Executive Committee and task force.

It is broad in scope. But, I think it's important to see our governance holistically. Only then can the best decision regarding board make-up be made.

Although there are several best practices and data out there, it's important to realize that every association is different. SPJ must determine the path that best suits its future.

I don't pull any punches. This may be unpleasant to read. But I have always had the luxury of being open and honest with leadership, so I'm banking on that.

I won't bury the lede, though. There is one major take-away from all my research:

*SPJ's governance is outdated and broken when compared to the most progressive/successful associations. If it wants to maximize its potential and remain relevant into the future, a **radical** change to its structure and culture is necessary.*

I've identified three problematic areas when comparing SPJ to the most successful associations:

- Board culture
- National board structure
- Delegate governance model