

Society of Professional Journalists

Governance Task Force

- Excellence in Journalism '16
 - Sept. 19, 2016
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Purpose

- Consider new **STRATEGY** for SPJ National Board
 - Focus on strategic direction, not projects

 - Consider new **STRUCTURE** for SPJ National Board
 - Reduce size, now at 23
 - Elect/appoint members for what they know/do (“*competency-based*”) rather than who they represent (“*representational*”)
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Timeline

- ❑ Over several decades: Board members suggest smaller, more nimble board
 - ❑ Spring 2016: Board votes down proposal to move from 12 to 9 regions
 - ❑ June 2016: Executive Committee creates Governance Task Force
 - ❑ Summer 2016: Task Force begins work
 - ❑ Fall/Winter 2016: Task Force to solicit member input (EIJ16, focus group, online options, Bylaw Committee)
 - ❑ April 2017: Task Force to recommend preliminary plan to Board.
 - ❑ EIJ17: Delegates to vote on board recommendation.
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Background

□ **Current “representational” board**

- 23 members with seven on Executive Committee
- Democratic, with all welcome to run, discuss, vote
- Diverse, with varied peoples and platforms
- Inefficient, with many agendas in play
- Risk averse, with “known” favored over “new”
- Hard to fill, with most elections uncontested
- Slow to act, with frequent call for “all vote” decisions
- Costly, with stipend system to defray expenses

*-- Contributions from: “Race for Relevance:
5 Radical Changes for Associations,”
by Harrison Coerver and Mary Byers, 2011.*

Background, cont' d

- **Possible new “competency-based” board**
 - Smaller, with between 5 and 11 members
 - Less tied to SPJ “populations,” with goal of finding the best candidates no matter where they work or live.
 - Less diverse, by virtue of size
 - More focused, with shared strategic goals
 - More open to risk, with “new” as mandate
 - Easier to fill, with targeted recruiting/appointing
 - Quicker to act, because of size and focus
 - Less costly, because of size
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Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

- **Would a smaller board serve SPJ's current priorities -- member service, advocacy, partnering with other media groups, staging EIJ and regional conferences, etc.?**
 - *Associations that have moved to competency-based boards do so in order to be better about determining priorities and working toward them in a strategic way.*
 - *A larger, unwieldy board populated by members with different agendas makes it harder to stay on course and meet priorities. Priorities change as individuals on the board come and go.*
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Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

- **Could a smaller board be implemented in stages – i.e., cut from 23 to 12 to 7?**
 - *Contraction over time is the approach most associations have used. This allows elected members to serve out their terms without “firing” anyone. Many also ask for volunteers to step down. Groups have found that some board members actually serve mostly out of obligation.*
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Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

□ **Could a smaller board really embrace diversity in the same way as a larger board?**

- *Author Mary Byers addresses this in “Race for Relevance,” p. 41: “The more important issue is keeping the board attuned to the diversity of needs, interests and circumstances.” So it’s not necessarily about the faces around the table, but about collecting diverse input before making decisions. Still, a Nominations Committee would need to work to present a diverse slate. And SPJ could opt to appoint some board seats to “fill in the gaps.”*
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Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

- **How would candidates for a competency-based board be identified, recruited, elected, trained, supported?**
 - *SPJ would need to lean on a smart, dedicated Nominations Committee. Strong associations spend significant time nurturing/identifying strong board candidates, interviewing them, recruiting them and training them. The Nominations Committee could also, then, be charged with ensuring board performance.*
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Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

- **How can SPJ grow leaders if a board position is not the ultimate reward?**
 - *Board positions would still be available – just fewer of them. And dedicated SPJers would become even more important to new and existing committees, communities, task forces and other working groups – since a leaner, more strategically oriented board would be asking those groups to do even more of the heavy lifting.*
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Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

□ Would SPJ retain its regional system (12 regions and 12 regional directors) under a smaller board?

■ *This is a big issue that needs much consideration. Earlier board restructuring plans focused on regional boundaries and responsibilities have failed.*

Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

- **Would RDs still serve on the board?**
 - *There would be no designated regional director seats on the board. However, RDs (or RD-hopefuls) could run for open at-large seats.*

 - **How would regional activities -- spring conferences, MOEs, annual reports, advocacy efforts, etc., be affected by a smaller board?**
 - *Staff is already beginning to consider how to accomplish these tasks if membership endorses any plan to calls for a change in regional operations.*
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Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

□ How would the SDX Foundation fill its SPJ board seats if the SPJ board is smaller?

- *There is actually no specific requirement related to how many SPJ members sit on the SDX Foundation board. The SDX bylaws call for an “unspecified number” of SPJ members. In recent years, that number has been seven.*
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Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

□ Would the SDX Foundation board need to downsize if the SPJ board is smaller?

■ *No and this Task Force is not looking at the SDX Board. But, yes, its board could shrink if SPJ's board gets smaller.*

Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

- **How can long-active leaders remain involved in SPJ if they have less of an opportunity to seek a board seat?**
 - *Associations that have a mechanism to connect volunteers with a wide variety of opportunities have higher member engagement. Toward that end, SPJ staff is working a “Volunteer Square” – a detailed list of volunteer opportunities for members at various levels of commitment.*
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Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

- **If the board is no longer representational, how will members be assured their individual needs are not ignored?**
 - *This issue also needs deeper consideration. Conducting general membership meetings at EIJs – like this one – could be part of the solution.*
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Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

- **If the board sets strategy instead of policy, wouldn't SPJ really be run by its executive director and staff instead of its elected leaders?**
 - *That would not be likely if the board sets policy along with strategy. A good model looks like this:*
 - The board creates a 3-5 year strategic plan.
 - The board creates annual goals -- based on items in the strategic plan.
 - The board then adopts a budget and creates policies/practices to reach those goals.
 - Those annual goals are then executed by staff and volunteers.
 - Progress is evaluated by staff and board, with new goals set each year.
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Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

□ So what is the role of staff in setting strategic goals?

- Staff should have input because 1.) they know SPJ inside and out; and 2.) they must provide buy-in for the board to achieve its goals.
 - “Race for Relevance” argues that groups without strategic boards have a greater chance of being staff-driven because:
 - board leaders, looking for guidance, turn to the executive director for answers.
 - absent direction from the board, exec directors and staff do what they think is best for the association.
 - in the end, staff trains leaders to rely on them for vision.
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Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

□ How would changing the size and focus of the board disrupt current SPJ priorities?

- *While some disruption would be unavoidable, much of the work of SPJ would carry on through its committees, communities, task forces, etc. Staff priorities -- membership, communications, EIJ, etc. -- would also continue during any change to a new board configuration.*
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Q&As

Lots of questions, some answers

- **What will SPJ do to provide transparency around this process?**
 - *The Task Force will work with the staff to provide avenues for input and involvement. We welcome your ideas in addition to the **Next Steps** outlined here ...*
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Next steps

- ❑ Create a **Focus Group** for 2-3 online discussions in Fall/Winter 2016
 - ❑ Create **page at spj.org** to solicit Focus Group members, seek general membership input and share information/updates
 - ❑ Create a **communication strategy** (print, online, social media) to share information/updates
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Task Force members

- ❑ Patti Newberry, Task Force chair, Region 4 director, newberpg@miamioh.edu
 - ❑ Irwin Gratz, former national SPJ president, igratz@mpbn.net
 - ❑ Victor Hernandez, former *EIJ Student News* adviser, victorhernandez34@gmail.com
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 - ❑ Joe Skeel, SPJ executive director, jskeel@hq.spj.org
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Thanks for your interest

- Please join us in the front of the room if you'd like to volunteer for the Focus Group.
 - Please reach out at EIJ16 or later via email, phone or text.
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