

MINUTES
SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
VIA TELECONFERENCE AND VIDEO CONFERENCE
FEB. 1, 2020

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

The public meeting was called to order at 12:01 p.m. EST. Those present were Patricia Gallagher Newberry, president; Matthew Hall, president-elect; Rebecca Aguilar, secretary-treasurer; Lauren Bartlett, director at-large; Tess Fox, director at-large; Taylor Mirfendereski, director at-large; Mike Reilley, director at-large. Directors At-Large Erica Carbajal and Yvette Walker joined later. Also present were Andy Schotz, parliamentarian; and staff members John Shertzer, executive director; Jake Koenig, controller; and Jennifer Royer, director of communications and marketing.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Bartlett to approve minutes from the October and November 2019 meetings. Hall seconded. Bartlett referred to an email she sent earlier with corrections on Pages 6 and 9 in the October minutes and Page 11 in the November minutes. Schotz added that he also sent some corrections via email, which included misspelling of names and that there are three new SDX Awards categories. He also asked if there were 300 candidates for the executive director position, adding that is what Talbott Talent told the board, but the board didn't see all the resumes. Hall said for consistency, on Page 9 of the October minutes, he should be referred to as Hall, not Matt. Vote to approve minutes with corrections passed.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Newberry referred to the report in the packet and mentioned she offered to pay the membership dues of young journalists who were interviewed recently in the New York Times.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Shertzer referred to his report in the board packet. Bartlett asked if he could update the board on the database issue. He said we are dealing with three different entities right now: the current provider, the one we want to investigate moving to and the one who we started to go with a year ago who feels we still have an agreement with. His goal is to clarify these issues by April's board meeting and will have more information to share then. He added that he has seen the limitations of the current system and it makes him want to move aggressively to a new system.

He updated the board on the Scripps Leadership Boot Camp in June, which will be for college members to attend and receive training and education on how to lead their newsrooms. There are also conversations happening with staff on developing training for chapter leaders and others within SPJ.

He has also been invited to a couple chapter meetings in April and is excited to attend those.

UPDATE OF STRATEGIC PLAN TASK FORCE

Newberry said Hall has done amazing work as chair of the task force, under the guidance of Victor Hernandez who was previous chair. The task force has met several times and conducted focus groups, surveys and collected information about what members believe SPJ does well, what it does poorly and what it should do moving forward.

Hall said the task force plans to have a 2- to 3-page report to give to the board at its April meeting. It will include five themes: membership, diversity, education and training (innovation), advocacy/lobbying/ethics/foi and financial growth and stability.

Bartlett suggested the board have a Zoom meeting in early July solely voted to the strategic plan to allow time for the board to give the task force suggestions and tweaks and give the task force time to make adjustments to the plan before EIJ20. She also voiced concerns about the groupings of the five themes and said she believes SPJ's greatest strength is also its greatest weakness: Trying to be everything to everybody. She said we should think about how many things we can reasonably achieve moving forward and how they fit with who we are and what we stand for. The goal after the April meeting is to have a document we agree on, she said.

Hall said the task force will bring something to the board, but staff will have to implement the plan, so staff's input and involvement will be necessary.

Bartlett said there's not a lot of time between now and April, and we should take more time if needed and possibly have another meeting in May.

UPDATE OF THE EIJ SPONSORSHIP TASK FORCE

Task Force Chair Nerissa Young gave an overview of the work that has been done and shared the policy the task force had developed. This task force also conducted a survey regarding what members and lapsed members think should be considered when considering EIJ sponsorships. They will put the policy out for member comment and vote at EIJ20. The task force thought SPJ's mission should be considered and sponsors should be in concert with SPJ's goals and mission.

Reilley said the policy is very broad and extends beyond EIJ.

Young said there was a lot of discussion about that among task force members and the thought was that sponsorships should be consistent on all fronts.

Reilley said he cannot support the policy as it is written because it rules out dozens and dozens of partners because people can misinterpret partnerships and we're walling ourselves off from potentially great partnerships.

Young pointed out that most of the policy was drafted from an ONA policy which was drafted from a previous SPJ policy.

Reilley said it can be misused as it is currently phrased.

The board discussed the survey questions and the low response to the survey. Hall said in general, younger members are probably more against taking sponsorship money than older members. Fox said she is probably in the minority and she has no problem with taking sponsorship money because it makes

it less costly for us to do conferences. Walker said taking money for good programming is not a bad thing. The perception is that sponsors have influence of the program, but that is not necessarily true. She added there must be a level of trust between members and those planning the conference and working with sponsors.

There was discussion about whether the board should suggest edits to the policy or have the task force come back with something else.

Young said it was a unanimous vote for the task force, so it would be very difficult for them to come up with something else because they all supported this policy.

Newberry said there are operating procedures in place for EIJ20 with partner RTDNA. Programming is being scheduled separately and SPJ has total control on its sponsorships. However, SPJ could say no to a sponsor and RTDNA could say yes, so a sponsor could still be at EIJ20 without SPJ's support. But there is a programming committee who can weigh in on the topic, Newberry, Hall and Shertzer are all on the calls regarding sponsorships and she thinks everyone will be paying much closer attention to sponsorships than in the past.

Shertzer said he would be reviewing the final contractual elements of the sponsorships and the decision to go with a sponsor or not would be a collaborative decision among himself, appropriate staff and the board. Staff won't approve sponsorships without board input.

FIRST QUARTER FY20 REPORT

Shertzer went over the financial and Koenig was there to answer questions. Newberry said Shertzer has only been on the job two months and inherited a flawed budget. Shertzer said he is dedicated to having a balanced budget. He would like a surplus, but for this next one, we'll just go with balanced. He also mentioned the possibility of moving to a January to December fiscal year. Hall asked what the best way to proceed would be. Koenig said he would need to check into the logistics and how quickly we could change our year-end and would have a short year the first year.

UPDATE ON EIJ20 PLANNING

Shertzer said he and Basharat Saleem on staff did a site visit and it is a great location and space. SPJ and RTNDA programming is being planned separately but anyone can attend any session. Registration opens March 23. Early bird deadline is June 26 and final deadline is Aug. 10. Sue Kopen Katcef, chair of SPJ's Awards & Honors Committee, said she hopes we will consider making Fellows of the Society lifetime members.

Bartlett made a motion that Fellows be made lifetime members of SPJ as part of the acceptance of becoming a Fellow, and they agree to participate in one SPJ activity. Reilley seconded. Vote passed unanimously.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Membership Committee: Shertzer said the February membership drive kicked off today. It is for new members only. The committee wanted to include renewals but he vetoed that proposal and the committee was good natured about it. So we will see how this new iteration of a discount works.

FOI Committee: It has been active and has done some great things. There will be discussion on how we can do more to let members know about advocacy, LDF, etc.

Bylaws Committee: Chair Bob Becker said the proposed bylaws changes are self-explanatory. Bartlett asked for clarification that if someone is elected vice president, they become president. But if they are appointed vice president, they would have to run for president? Becker said that is correct. Bartlett made a motion to accept the proposal to make the language changes in the bylaws. Hall seconded.

Walker asked if there is any reason not to go back to using vice president. Becker said using president-elect gives the impression that person succeeds the president, which isn't always the case. Hall asked when it would take effect. Becker said amendments take effect immediately after they are approved by the convention. Delegates would have to approve the bylaws change in September at EIJ20 for them to go into effect immediately. Motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Bob Becker commented on the strategic plan and sponsorship task force reports, saying the surveys show there is a fundamental misunderstanding of what SPJ is. One of the reasons is that the organization is so broad, it includes publishers, editors, reporters, freelancers – people at all levels in the industry. From the surveys, it appears a significant number of members think SPJ should be only for employed journalists, but that is antithetical of the approach which the organization operates, he said. That's why SPJ has refused to become involved in relationships between reporters and their bosses. As part of our education process, we need to make it clear who we are and why we are the way we are.

Becker also discussed the nominating process and how critical it is to the restructuring of SPJ. Part of the nominating process was to have a screening process, which should be starting now. In order for this organization to move forward, the nominating committee needs to function as it was intended so there are contested elections at all levels, he said.

Michael Koretzky discussed advocacy and diversity, saying one way to have diversity is to have interesting programs. He believes SPJ is diverse, just not at the national level. If not, why? He said SPJ might have to be more innovative than it is traditionally comfortable with. He also said SPJ Florida is very active in supporting unions. He doesn't know what happens if national doesn't want to do something, but a chapter does. But he hopes no one says SPJ Florida can no longer do that.

Sergy Odiduro sent a letter expressing concern about the budget deficit and asked if, historically speaking, SPJ faced a deficit like this before. Sue Kopen Katcef said yes, when SPJ headquarters was in Chicago there was a deficit much worse. Newberry added that an audit is a backward looking process and the deficit is a forward looking issue we have to resolve as we create the next budget. She is urging headquarters staff to move to the new fiscal year with a better picture on how to attack the current deficit and prevent future deficits.

Sue Kopen Katcef said she would like to see a meeting for student members at EIJ revived.

Jennifer Ellis said she wonders if chapter leaders realize how much time SPJ HQ spends on association management clients, etc., and thinks it would be beneficial to have chapter leader training sessions at EIJ that explain everything HQ does. Since we are no longer doing that with Scripps, EIJ seems like the logical place to do it. Others agreed.

ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION

Aguilar made a motion to enter executive session. Hall seconded. Newberry said they would discuss partnership agreements, database management and a legal matter.

The board voted to enter executive session at 2:55 p.m. EST.

EXIT EXECUTIVE SESSION

The board exited executive session at 4:01 p.m. EST.

MEETING ADJOURNED

Bartlett moved to adjourn. Mirfendereski seconded.

The board unanimously voted to adjourn at 4:03 p.m. EST.