

MINUTES
SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

DATE: SEPT. 5, 2020

TIME: NOON, EDT

VIEW A RECORDING OF THIS MEETING AT: [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=E3CGVOHAG_C](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3CGVOHAG_C)

CALL TO ORDER

President Patricia Gallagher Newberry called the meeting to order at noon.

ROLL CALL

Secretary-treasurer Rebecca Aguilar called roll. Those present were Newberry, President-elect Matt Hall, Aguilar, Directors At-Large Lauren Bartlett, Taylor Mirfendereski, Mike Reilley, Yvette Walker. Not present were Directors At-Large Tess Fox and Erica Carbajal. Also present were Parliamentarian Andy Schotz; and staff Executive Director John Shertzer; Director of Communications and Marketing Jennifer Royer; Manager of Membership and Chapters Caroline Escobar; and Controller Jake Koenig.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The board considered the draft minutes of the June 27 meeting. Bartlett made a motion to consider the meeting minutes. Hall seconded. Hall noted that Mirfendereski's and Carbajal's last names were misspelled in the draft minutes. Bob Shapiro's name was also misspelled. Bartlett sent corrections to HQ via email. Newberry had a couple typos that she will send to HQ that don't change meaning of the content. Motion passed.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Newberry referred to her report in the board meeting materials but thanked exiting board members Reilley and Fox for their service. She also noted that Mirfendereski and Carbajal will be rotating off the board as the two appointed members, but will stay until their appointed replacements are selected. She complimented the board on a successful year, pointing out that the board took the concerns of members and implemented them, including quickly planning a successful 2-day virtual conference and providing an informational session on the new member database to members who are interested.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Shertzer also referred to his report in the board meeting materials and agreed with Newberry's assessment of the year and thanked staff for attending the board meeting on a Saturday and working the virtual conference the next weekend.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Escobar pointed everyone to the memo in the board meeting materials and requested action be taken on the chapters listed.

Bartlett moved to deactivate all the chapters on the list except IUPUI, Baylor and Minnesota State. Reilley seconded. Bartlett said she asked the RCs to report any chapters they thought could be saved. She said IUPUI recently contacted RC Amy Merrick about restarting the chapter. RC Kathryn Jones wants to contact Baylor. And RC Joes Radske reported that Minnesota State was on the verge of getting back on its feet when the pandemic hit and hopes to help bring it back in the spring semester.

Hall asked what efforts were made to see if the chapters were active and what the procedure is for reactivating them if they choose to do so on their campus. Escobar said in addition to Bartlett reaching out to the RCs, Escobar investigated websites to see if she could get contact information on chapter advisers, she checked the database and tried however she could to find a contact. Escobar said to reactivate, they have to follow the requirements outlined on the website, but she will make it as easy as possible by waiving the application fee. Otherwise, they need to submit a list of 10 members of the chapter, hold an election of three or four officers. They are also asked to update their bylaws and give a copy to Escobar. She also requests a plan of action.

Bartlett said she would like to add a friendly amendment to her motion that adds the University of Missouri to the list of schools not deactivated yet. Reilley accepted friendly amendment. Motion was to deactivate 16 student chapters and keep 4. Motion passed.

Staff requested a second motion to accept the University of New Hampshire to activate a chapter. Hall moved, Bartlett seconded. Motion passed.

SPJ2020 UPDATE

Newberry reported as of now there are 451 registrations and asked that everyone register promptly if they haven't already and promote the conference within their circles. She said there is a remarkable lineup and she is excited we are highlighting the Fellows of the Society this year. Super Sessions are very well populated and there are great breakouts and a couple of film opportunities this year. She added that staff has been working non-stop to put the pieces together. Schotz asked what the process is for paying for students to attend? Shertzer said if anyone wants to pay for multiple students, they should reach out to him, preferably with names of the students who will be attending. Then HQ can send them a comp code. Hall said he had 10 students reach out to him after he tweeted that he would pay someone's way to the conference. He said it is a big way to get student journalists into the organization. The 10 students he sponsored are mostly women, mostly journalists of color from all over the country. He encouraged everyone else to sponsor students because it can really make an impact in a student's life.

SPJ 2020 VOTING

Newberry called on Shertzer to walk through how voting will work at this year's virtual conference. Shertzer said it will all be done electronically this year via the same software we've used for several years. Candidates were asked to prepare videos of them giving their campaign speeches and those were shared via Election Central on spj.org. Members will receive login credentials to participate and voting opens at noon Friday and closes at noon Sunday during SPJ2020. Hall made a motion so everyone is clear on what the bylaws say about voting and the unusual nature of the election, so we have the ability to handle the election how we are going to do it. Bartlett seconded. Motion passed. There was discussion about how resolutions would work in the virtual business meeting. Michael Savino, chair of the resolutions committee, said there were 13 resolutions submitted, the same number as the year before. He said the one resolution that could be considered controversial is the sponsorship policy resolution.

Schotz asked, because the process is only a few years old, if someone could go over the process of adding regional delegates for unaffiliated chapters. Escobar said only one person came forward in five regions to be a delegate. The deadline was extended. Newberry said the goal is to make sure there is representation for all 12 regions. Bartlett said HQ reaches out and puts information into Leads and it has been out there pretty frequently but there has not been a large amount of interest. Newberry asked if that work should be assigned to a committee? Bartlett said the regional coordinators are probably the best group to recruit delegates.

FUTURE CONFERENCE OPTIONS

Reilley mad a motion to move this item to discuss right before the public comment period to allow those from the public on the call to comment. Walker seconded. Motion failed.

Newberry referenced the memo in the board packet, highlighting the consideration of the SPJ conference being in Washington, D.C., for the next three years after New Orleans in 2021. Benefits would include efficiency, cost and negotiating power. Shertzer presented slides with other background, stressing that convention does not equal membership growth, nor should it. Rather, it is an opportunity to carry out the mission of the organization. He said the annual conference could be taken to all sorts of new heights once the organization rebuilds its muscle. He can't honestly say if we continue to rotate around the country that we aren't going to keep getting the same results, he said. He then pointed to the slides and information about where most of SPJ's membership is located, among other reasons making the case for the conference staying in D.C. for three years.

Bartlett said she appreciates Shertzer's innovative thinking but would like more information before a decision is made. What would the cost savings be with one hotel chain in multiple cities? She said she has a lot of concerns with the conference being in D.C. three years in a row. Yes, a strong presence there is important, but during convention time is not a time when staff or officers have the time to meet with lawmakers, etc. That should be done during a different time of year. She is also concerned about the extra time off people in the west need to take when the conference is in the east. She is not looking for equality in the number of times convention is held in the west vs. east, but it is about accessibility to members. She would also like to look at different dates. At this point, however, she is in favor of a multi-city approach.

Walker said from a financial point of view, doing something different than what membership is used to, and the statement it could make are all valid points for being in D.C. three years in a row. But journalists are not used to going to the same city for three years. NAB does it, but other journalism organizations move around. Some may really find it appealing, but we have to make sure it's part of our strategic plan that we are going to use this as a statement, as an opportunity, to be in D.C. more.

Hall said if we eventually have a staffer doing advocacy work in D.C. there are a lot of synergies there with having the conference there as well. We can survey the membership and ask them if they would go to D.C. for three straight years. That makes the decision even easier. He is leaning toward this being a brilliant idea and a smart risk.

Shertzer said there is no exact formula and it would be smart to make a decision between now and the end of the year so we have a full year knowing where we will be in 2022 and maybe 2023 at the same time.

Newberry asked about partnerships. Next year SPJ is solo in New Orleans. If we make a decision without a partner, then we're asking someone to follow our lead. If we are open and interested in having partners, how would this affect them?

Shertzer said in his opinion, we should strive to be the journalism conference to end all journalism conferences. We should be open to having many partners and if we know we're going to be in one place for the next few years, where many organizations are already headquartered, it's an easier sell in his mind. But it is all theoretical.

Mirfendereski, agreed that seeing the financials of being in the same hotel chain in different cities in consecutive years vs. in D.C. for consecutive years would be helpful.

Bartlett made a motion that HQ send a member survey on the SPJ conference being in D.C. three consecutive years and that HQ staff get information from at least three hotel chains about the cost savings of using the same chain in different cities three consecutive years. And if needed, we obtain information about different dates in D.C. over the three years. Shertzer said he could get the info to the board within one month. Walker seconded the motion. Mirfendereski asked to see financials for being in D.C. for three years as well. Aguilar added that it may be possible to collaborate with other groups who may already be booked and have a deal. Bartlett amended her motion to find out the cost of being in D.C. for two years. Walker accepted the amendment. Motion passed.

Newberry said they will return to the discussion in executive session to look at the attached dollars with the three years in D.C. model.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

Shertzer reported that SPJ is now in the black to a positive \$20,000 after predicting we would be at a negative \$60,000 at this point in the year. Newberry asked about the financial impact of a virtual conference and Shertzer said it should be a net positive event. Reilley pointed out that the figure did not include the \$25,000 Google gives for the conference every year. Shertzer also pointed out the board expenses for the last two quarters were zero because of no travel due to the pandemic. He pointed the board to the reports in the packet.

STRATEGIC PLANNING UPDATE

Shertzer presented the Strategic Plan, which was created by the task force who spent the last two years gathering input from members, collecting data and doing research. The plan will define the future of the organization and help to understand who SPJ is. He went through the first year, the 2021 annual plan, but stressed that staff would get started immediately on the plan if it is approved. They would not wait until 2021.

Newberry asked if the board should make a recommendation to the incoming board, or should the current board vote on it.

Hall, as chair of the task force, thanked everyone involved in the multi-year process. Hall made a motion to approve the strategic plan. Reilley seconded. Newberry said the one-year plan is ambitious but doable. Will we hit every mark? Maybe not, but let's aim high, she said.

Aguilar agreed it is a wonderful plan, and it is very empowering and encouraging. She suggested that included in "champions for journalists" we include mid-career journalists because they never stop learning.

Bartlett commended the task force and Shertzer on a wonderful job. She knows how hard he has worked and thinks the board should adopt the overall plan and the 2021 plan and start the work immediately.

Hall moved to adopt the overall strategic plan and the 2021 plan. Bartlett seconded. Motion passed.

BADGE PROPOSAL

Newberry referenced the badge proposal from the Freelance Community. Hilary Niles of the Freelance Community stressed it is an enhanced membership card, not a press credential, which simply shows that someone is a member of SPJ. It would include member photos and would hopefully help convince authorities that the person is a journalist. Bartlett said she understands and supports the idea of a photo ID card, but SPJ has tried for many years to avoid defining a journalist. She is also hesitant to support including wording on the card that says "member in good standing."

Niles said NPPA issues a similar type of card and said the reason this issue came up was because freelancer and member Haisten Willis was detained while covering protests in Atlanta and had a difficult time convincing police that he was press and not subject to the curfew.

Bartlett moved to adopt the concept in the proposal of an enhanced ID card that would include SPJ members' photo and other details to be worked out between the freelance community and staff based on guidance from the board. Mirfendereski seconded. Hall asked if associate members would be able to purchase them. Niles said the proposal says pro, retired, post grad and college student members would be eligible. Newberry said other details such as cost would need to be worked out later. Today's vote is whether to move the concept forward. Vote was taken with Reilley abstaining. Motion carried.

LOCAL NEWS MEMO

Newberry referred to the Rebuild Local News Memo in the packet. The group is looking for support and participation. Bob Becker said he is among people who are very troubled by government funding or sponsorships of media. Hall said there are good ideas in the memo, but too many ideas, some of which are troubling to him. Mirfendereski said she doesn't support it and thinks SPJ should pass because of how the public would perceive the relationship between journalists and the government and journalists' ability to cover the government. Newberry offered to connect Hall with Steve Waldman to pick up the discussion.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Newberry referred everyone to the committees and communities reports in the board packet and briefly mentioned highlights from each one. Niles asked to bring to everyone's attention the AB5 bill in California and how it affects freelancers. She said the bill makes it illegal for freelance journalists to run their businesses. She said the freelance community could use some guidance and also a unified response from organizations as a whole, not just the freelance community. Hall said he and Shertzer will work with Niles on a proper response on the issue.

Primerano said the Regional Coordinators didn't think the pandemic would go on long enough to not only cancel regional conferences in 2020, but possibly 2021 as well. She said the RCs are discussing that possibility now. Aguilar said as SPJ talks with hotels about contracts for the conference, it would be helpful to share with RCs what they find out regarding how the pandemic is changing the way contracts are written to help those who are thinking of having conferences next years.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Deb Krol said she agrees that it is good to look at ways to save money when it comes to the annual conference, but having it on the west coast three years in a row makes it even more difficult for people living west of the Mississippi.

Colin DeVries said he is still hearing that members are worried about dues and chapters are concerned they might have a dip in membership due to the pandemic and employment reasons. He would like to see members able to renew at last year's promotional rate or renew at some type of discounted rate due to the pandemic. Newberry said the next board can take that up with the FY2021 budget, which will have a line for membership revenue. It would also give leaders time to consider how that lost revenue would be replaced.

Schotz said Newberry has thanked a lot of people but he thinks she deserves thanks as well for all she and the board accomplished this year.

Hazel Becker said she was pleased by the support for freelancers during the discussion and she hopes the new board will stay at the forefront of that discussion because there are going to be more freelancers because of circumstances and also by choice. She hopes SPJ will be there for freelancers.

ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION

Reilley moved to enter executive session. Bartlett seconded. The board entered executive session at 2:45 p.m. EDT.

EXIT EXECUTIVE SESSION

The board exited executive session at 3:08 p.m. EDT. Newberry said no additional action was taken about future conference, but the board did discuss the financials related to it.

ADJOURNMENT

Newberry adjourned the meeting at 3:09 p.m. EDT.