



**MINUTES**  
**SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

DATE: FEB. 20, 2021  
1 P.M. EST

**Meeting Called to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 1:02 p.m. EST by President Matthew T. Hall.

**Roll Call**

Those present were Hall; Rebecca Aguilar, president-elect; Ivette Davila-Richards, secretary-treasurer; Lauren Bartlett, director at-large; Jerry McCormick, director at-large; Rafael Olmeda, director at-large; Claire Regan, director at-large; Bey-Ling Sha, director at-large; Yvette Walker, director at-large. Also present were John Shertzer, executive director; Karyn Sneath, director of education; Jake Koenig, controller; and Katie Riggs, convention consultant/coordinator.

**2021 SPJ Convention Discussion**

Shertzer gave a presentation on considerations for the 2021 convention and the results of a member survey. He noted the savings for a virtual event would not be greater than the penalty cost to cancel the contract with the venue.

The meeting was opened up to comments and questions from the board; Shertzer, Riggs and Koenig answer. SPJ is waiting on bids from three potential vendors to facilitate a hybrid conference which could easily be transitioned to fully virtual. Much of the discussion centered on the costs, savings and revenue possibilities for both options.

Aguilar asked about liability insurance in case someone gets sick at a hybrid conference. Other organization have done medial waivers, which Riggs said could be built into the registration forms. She shared information on a [New Orleans bill that prevents organizers from being sued](#). Shertzer said they will consult lawyers before the next discussion on the 2021 convention. Riggs

will also provide data specifically on which conventions/organizations have done a hybrid convention during the pandemic.

Board discussed other precautions like social distancing, masks, hand sanitizer, etc. Riggs noted the convention will follow CDC guidelines and SPJ will budget to have plenty of PPE. Sha reminds everyone to consider the perspective of equity when discussing the hybrid convention.

### **Public Comment Period**

Members in attendance discussed expected attendance, the possibility of requiring attendees to be vaccinated, workplace regulations on travel, virtual conference components and offerings, the contract with the hotel, whether they would attend and their recommendations on the board should vote today.

### **2021 SPJ Convention Further Board Discussion**

Bartlett moved to continue to pursue a hybrid model and discuss it more at the April meeting when more information is available. Sha seconds. Vote is not taken yet as board continued to discuss.

Member and attendee health and safety is the most important thing to the board and staff. Approving the motion will delay the making a final decision until more information is available. Not matter what is ultimately decided, members will be able to join virtually so that no one misses out on a good conversation. Sha asked that SPJ get information from the vendors bidding on the convention contract on how they will address equity between the virtual and in-person experience.

Bartlett restated the motion with an amendment based on the board's discussion: Continue to pursue the hybrid model and revisit the decision at the April 17 board meeting, and in the meantime get the requested information from staff and SPJ's attorney. SPJ will provide information from attorneys, the venue, membership survey, etc. Sha seconded with amendment. The amended motion passed with no one opposing or abstaining.

### **Adjournment**

Davila-Richards motioned to adjourn. Bartlett seconded. The meeting adjourns at 3:10 p.m. EST.