



*MEETING MINUTES*  
**SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**  
MAY 25, 2023

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

SPJ President Claire Regan called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. EDT.

**ROLL CALL**

Treasurer-Secretary Israel Balderas called roll. Present via Zoom were: Claire Regan, Ashanti Blaze-Hopkins, Emily Block, Kevin Smith, and Peter Szekely. Daniela Ibarra, Jody Rave Spotted Bear and Adam Sennot not present. Daniela arrived at 7:09 p.m.

**WELCOME**

Regan informed the Society that today's meeting was on a weeknight. Due to the short time span between board meetings, there were no committee chair reports, interim executive director or president's report. She informed the members there would be an executive session followed by a second public comment period.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Regan called for a motion to approve the meeting minutes from April 29, 2023. Blaze-Hopkins made the initial motion. Smith seconded. No discussions or corrections. The motion passed unanimously.

**2024 CONVENTION DISCUSSION**

Regan and Katie Riggs, Event Strategist  
Interim Executive Director Jennifer Royer started the presentation.

The SPJ HQ is contemplating hosting an in-person convention in Cincinnati or Indianapolis in 2024, which is SPJ's 115<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Marriott at River Center and the Embassy Suites by Hilton in Cincinnati have both expressed interest in hosting the convention. They are available in early October. The Marriott Downtown, the JW Marriott Downtown, and the Hyatt Regency in Indianapolis have also expressed interest in hosting the convention. They are available in September and October.

Due to budget concerns, SPJ is also considering hosting a virtual convention in 2024, alternating in-person and virtual conventions, hosting in-person conventions every other year, or partnering with ACP and CMA in Washington DC every three years (2025 and 2028). Nonetheless, Royer recommended scheduling conventions out several years in advance to get better dates and pricing.

Royer highlighted recent conventions for further consideration:  
In 2022, the convention took place in DC with 1800 attendees.

In 2021, the convention was virtual, and there were 457 attendees with 40 total virtual sessions.

In 2020, the first virtual convention took place due to COVID, with 388 attendees and 25 sessions.

In 2019, the convention was held in San Antonio, with almost 1500 attendees.

Royer then handed over the presentation to Riggs. Regan opened up comment period for Board members.

Emily Block asked Katie if there was one site she highly recommended.

Riggs recommended Indianapolis as the site for the 2024 convention because she has strong relationships with the local tourism board and hoteliers. She also believes that the SPJ will be able to negotiate a better deal in Indianapolis. She recommended staff have visits to both locations.

Block flagged comments made by Bob Becker to keep Jewish holidays in mind as the organization plans for a convention.

She also asked if either Cincinnati or Indianapolis could offer partnership opportunities.

Ashanti Blaze Hopkins said she has spoken to several organizations (NABJ, NAHJ, ACP, CMA etc.). They are looked in for 2024.

When asked about the possibility of partnering with ACP and CMA in Washington DC, Riggs said that this is an option that SPJ is considering. However, she noted that it would require a significant commitment from all three organizations.

Balderas asked Riggs about the benefits of a virtual convention vs. in person. He asked about Indianapolis and the number of attendees needed for the conference to be financially either break even or profitable. She anticipated attendance at 450 ( vs. DC was 800) as long as SPJ keeps all costs under control. Balderas asked if Blaize-Hopkins could comment on the benefits of a virtual convention.

Blaze-Hopkins expressed two concerns: paying attention to what we have going out in addition to what we have coming in; the timing in planning the convention is very late. She also was concerned about the economy and the state of the news industry, with massive amount of layoffs and likely more layoffs to come. By the time SPJ gets to 2024, there's a possibility that people aren't going to either have the money or be willing to spend it on a convention. Providing a virtual convention in 2024 from an equity standpoint would mean that more people would get to attend.

Ibarra agreed with Blaize-Hopkins regarding the concerns she raised regarding budget and timing.

Peter asked for guidance from Riggs regarding how economic projections would impact conventions costs.

Riggs said the overall data in the meetings and event industry is that people do not want virtual She said it's a problem for most organizations that are choosing to try to stay fully virtual to either save cost or to save planning time or whatever the reason is they're choosing that because people can consume content anywhere but what they can't do online is deep in relationships build a connection to your organization.

Kevin Smith said he agreed with Riggs that Indianapolis would be a great convention spot and he liked the concessions already made. He also agreed that best next steps would be on site visits.

Regan asked board members if they knew of other similar organizations planning virtual meetings. Ibarra said the DEI symposium was online. Block said that was just one symposium but the main conference was in person.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

Regan then opened up public comment for 2024 convention.

Brendan O'Reilly said the membership committee had met the day before and the sentiment of the membership committee was in favor of an in-person convention.

Robert Becker suggested that unless SPJ is expecting the convention to lose money, and he referenced Katie as telling the board that it probably won't, then it didn't benefit SPJ's financial situation to have a virtual rather than an in-person convention.

Stephanie Overman said she agreed with Becker.

Jennifer Ellis echoed everything that the public comments had already said.

Nicole DeCriscio said having the convention in Indy in person would allow for some savings for HQ staff because a lot of them are in Indianapolis and there would be no flight costs.

Loretta McGraw said she too believes that it should be in person and she liked Indianapolis as the convention location.

Robert Becker commented a second time that having the conference in October (Cincinnati) would impact Jewish members because the dates suggested would fall on Rosh Hashanah.

Kevin Smith suggested to keep the convention dates as far away from Election 2024 (because that impacts journalists covering the presidential race).

- a. Board Vote - Regan closed public comment. She asked if there was a motion to vote for in person versus virtual convention. Smith made the motion to instruct staff to proceed with a 2024 in person convention with either in Indianapolis or Cincinnati in September. Block seconded. Balderas took roll call vote - Smith (yes), Blaize-Hopkins (no), Bloch (yes), Szekely (yes), Ibarra (no), Rave Spotted Bear (yes) and Balderas (yes). Motion passed 6 – 2 (Sennot absent).

Emily Block asked for board to entertain the idea of partnering with CMA and ACP every three years. She believes it's really important that SPJ continue our partnership with student media.

Blaze Hopkins agreed with Block.

Ibarra also expressed agreement with Block and Blaze Hopkins. Balderas also agreed.

Regan added that Washington D.C. is a great news town.

Regan introduced Jackie Alexander, incoming president of CMA to comment. She deferred to Bob Becker to speak first.

Becker suggested the convention move around the country rather than just be in DC every three years.

Blaize Hopkins made a motion to allow HQ staff to move forward with negotiating a contract or memorandum of understanding the CMA ACP for every three years in DC. Block seconded.

Regan asked for any discussion.

Smith suggested SPJ be on the lookout for relationships with other organizations.

Regan called for a vote. It was unanimous by a voice vote. The motion passed.

## **OLD/NEW BUSINESS**

Smith acknowledged that the board would go into executive session with regards to the journalist toolbox on the SPJ website. He wanted to know if Mike Riley would be allowed to be in that executive session to answer questions. If not, could he comment before the board went into executive session and answer some of the board questions.

SPJ Attorney Mark Bailen by phone said Mike Riley could be invited into executive session at any time.

Prior to moving into executive session, Bob Becker asked if agenda item # 9 Public Comment could be moved prior to executive session. Regan said yes.

Hazel Becker asked that in the future for SPJ HQ to pupt as many things (documents) as possible to be put into the Dropbox for meeting preparation. Royer said yes. Regan acknowledged that under her leadership, she has strived to be more transparent.

## **ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Enter Executive Session

Fellows of the Society selection

Journalist's Toolbox contract

Regan asked if there was a motion to move into executive session. Balderas moved. Peter seconded. The vote was unanimous.

## **EXIT EXECUTIVE SESSION**

SPJ Board came out of executive session at 10:40pm EDT.

Blaize-Hopkins made the motion to approve a contract to assign the journalist toolbox website and its content over to a third party. Peter seconded. Regan opened for discussion. The vote was Unanimous to oppose the motion. The motion did not pass.

Regan asked for a motion regarding the Fellows of the Society. Blaize-Hopkins moved to table the discussion for the fellows of the society to a later date. Jody Rave Spotted Bear seconded. The vote was Unanimous to table discussion.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

Jennifer Ellis asked about the vote regarding the journalist's toolbox. Balderas informed Ellis that HQ will be managing the website.

Nicole DeCriscio expressed support for the 2024 convention to be held in Indianapolis. It would be of tremendous benefit to HQ.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Regan asked for a motion to adjourn. Blaize-Hopkins moved to adjourned. Ibarra Seconded. Motion was unanimous. Meeting adjourned at 10:52 p.m. EDT.