What does the Society of Professional Journalists do well? What does it do poorly? What should it focus on? How should it accomplish its goals? Our members told us.

The SPJ Strategic Planning Task Force held three focus group sessions for members in fall 2019 to have in-depth discussions about what they like and don’t like about SPJ and what they want to see the organization do more or do better in the future.

Before these discussions, the task force met by teleconference on Oct. 24 to discuss our approach and draft a brief survey for our participants. We sent a series of strategic questions out ahead of time, asking members the following: What comes to mind when you think of SPJ? What should SPJ be known for in the future? Which other journalism groups do you belong to? What do you like about those groups? Which journalism groups should SPJ partner with in the future? What turns you on or off about SPJ? What would make you proud of the organization? If you have a specific problem with SPJ, how can we solve it? What should SPJ do that it is not doing now? If SPJ focused more on advocacy, what types should it focus on? What is a big idea you have for SPJ? The two dozen written answers that we received are appended here as Attachment A.

Nearly 75 of SPJ’s nearly 6,000 members volunteered to take part in our brainstorming sessions after outreach via social media and membership email solicitations. Some two dozen members ultimately did. Their ideas and suggestions are presented here by category, thanks to work by SPJ communications staffer Jennifer Royer and Zoe Berg.

For those who want more detail, meeting minutes are included as Attachment B, along with an email from an SPJ chapter leader.

The 90-minute teleconference sessions were planned for Saturday, Oct. 26 at noon EDT (for pros); Tuesday, Oct. 29 at 8 p.m. EDT (for students); and Wednesday, Oct. 30 at 11 a.m. EDT (for post grads). When no one joined us for that final session, we scheduled a new one instead on Wednesday, Nov. 6 at 8 p.m. EST (for any member).
Our focus group participants included:

Fifteen members on Oct. 26: Bob Becker, Hazel Becker, Garth Bishop, David Cuilier, Carolyn Cunningham, Jennifer Ellis, Ginny Frizzi, Tim Gruver, Jennifer Karchmer, Jonathan Make, Dan Mika, Suzanne McBride, Sal Morales, Shirley Tang and Haisten Willis

Seven members on Oct. 29: Vaughn Golden, Brianne Hendricks, Joseph Maronski, David Morri, Emma Scher, Emily Waldenberg and Peggy Sue Wood

Four members on Nov. 6: Theola DeBose, Annie Culver, Lourdes Mestre and Linda Delmonico Prussen

We offer a big thanks to them for talking with us, and a big thanks to you for listening to them. Some talked, others preferred to listen. The ideas presented here offer a range of priorities and show what these members value in our organization.

Generally speaking, the professional participants said they value and want SPJ to focus on ethics, advocacy, media literacy and trust, diversity, partnerships with groups inside and outside journalism, training, education and networking. Their big ideas included more student involvement and outreach, a new ombud position, a journalism accelerator focused on the business of journalism and news deserts, moving SPJ to D.C. and focusing on advocacy and lobbying, partnering with the Student Press Law Center, changing SPJ’s name from the Society of Professional Journalists to the Society for Professional Journalism and expanding digital offerings to help members via things like databases and Slack workspaces.

Meanwhile, student participants want SPJ to pursue advocacy, especially for local journalism; more interaction with young professionals, both at EIJ and online; mentorships; the creation of a campus ambassador program to have SPJ people on campus more regularly; better programs at EIJ (podcasts on a dime, Instagram stories), “speed dating” sessions to meet pros; more webinars; more online communities (like LinkedIn or Facebook groups); more merchandise; and a student council for student leaders.

Members of the third focus group touted the importance of advocacy, diversity and partnerships. They want SPJ to sell a calendar to promote journalism and advocacy, create a searchable mentorship database, have more Google hangouts and market SPJ better with a social media series of short member profiles.
Oct. 26 pro member focus group

Likes:

- The people members become close to and the bonds that form as a result. This is important for freelancers and young people. Hazel Becker
- Networking, especially as a freelancer. Haisten Willis
- Collaborations with the society, its partnerships and working together for a common cause. Shirley Tang
- The connections that are made, advocacy efforts, training, foresight into where journalism is going, which is on display at EIJ. Having the Code of Ethics sets us apart, but we should point to it more often. Garth Bishop
- Code of Ethics, that SPJ means something, and networking. SPJ is welcoming to freelancers. Other organizations give off the impression that freelancers are unemployed or unusable. Sal Morales
- SPJ's programming, its people, advocacy of First Amendment and the LDF. Ginny Frizzi
- Agrees with previous participants, especially likes networking and training. Dan Mika
- That SPJ exists, the longevity and history of the organization, Code of Ethics, the people, networking and working with likeminded people. SPJ's website has a slew of resources that are hidden and could probably be updated. Jennifer Karchmer
- Advocacy on behalf of freedom of information. Bob Becker
- Values SPJ for the talent, expertise, experience and watchdog attitude members should have. Tim Gruver
- Improving and protecting journalism. The training offered, Code of Ethics, the diversity component, advocacy for freedom of information and first amendment and the Legal Defense Fund are all good. The important thing is journalism not journalists. Networking is great but networking with other journalists is not the reason most people join. It just matters that members share ideals about the value of journalism and protecting it, not that they're journalists. Jennifer Ellis
- Keep the inclusive spirit. SPJ is not elitist and we’re welcoming of new members and generally of new ideas. Not all other journalism organizations do that. Keep doing the convention. Jonathan Make
- SPJ is the most broad-based journalism organization and tries to do a lot... Dave Cuillier

Dislikes/Improvements:

- ... SPJ is the most broad-based journalism organization and tries to do a lot. Dave Cuillier
• Maybe too much oversight of chapters; SPJ should just focus on supporting chapters. **Hazel Becker**
• Infighting, but that comes with the volunteer territory. **Haisten Willis**
• Tendency for infighting can be expected because members have strong opinions. But the negative side to that is a level of cynicism among members. **Garth Bishop**
• Wish Florida chapter was stronger and had more events and cohesive way of getting to know each other. **Sal Morales**
• There has been too much staff turnover, so members are not getting as much help from National because the staff is new. SPJ should start promoting itself more and do more PR/marketing. There should be more of a concentrated effort on promoting itself. **Ginny Frizzi**
• Don’t see a big-name association. SPJ should do more with big-name journalists, because this might help the public know us and see what we do. It would be good to do more outreach and get more name recognition. **Jennifer Karchmer**
• SPJ still looks like the industry did before 1990 with a focus on traditional print and broadcast media. Growth in that area has been negative and other areas have been positive. Those are areas that focus on selling information not ads. Those people came not from journalism schools but by having information on a specific subject, and they don’t know we exist. **Bob Becker**
• The biggest question not being asked is how many of us look like America. SPJ isn’t bringing up unionization, collective bargaining rights, equal pay and fair pay, especially for journalists of color; instead there’s an increasingly homogenous bubble in an organization that generally still favors white male journalists. We like to take the reductive attitude that the blue-collar, working-class is too dumb to understand what real news is. Not happy that SPJ tried to legitimize Fox News with the EIJ partnership. SPJ will have to take a stance on what it considers news making and which outlets it legitimizes. SPJ should think about speaking truth to power. **Tim Gruver**
• Lack of communication. **Jennifer Ellis**

Focus:

• SPJ should be a group that is standing out front showing what journalists need to do to practice professional journalism. **Hazel Becker**
• SPJ could and should do as much advocacy as possible. Make advocacy SPJ’s biggest push. Fight the fight out in public. **Haisten Willis**
• Helping other journalist to achieve their goal or passion. **Shirley Tang**
• Increase the visibility of the Code, push individual success stories to help show what SPJ does for individuals, increase media literacy efforts, increase efforts to bring in younger people or new members by figure out what appeals to these groups. Connect with younger people in the industry who aren’t members and specifically mention the social aspect. **Garth Bishop**
• SPJ should put more of an emphasis on people in transition and people who need to make a living and are further along in their career and less emphasis on students. SPJ should also focus more on freelancing and diversity. **Sal Morales**

• Economics of journalism. SPJ should look at different models to fund journalism, especially at the local levels. There is not just a trust crisis, there is a financial crisis. SPJ should collaborate with places focusing on this and test models. SPJ should also focus on news literacy, maybe in schools or with people who are not tech literate. SPJ should also work to improve working conditions for journalists, like making sure reporters aren’t made to create too much content and have the time to produce good work. **Dan Mika**

• Would like to see more outreach to students and up-and-coming journalists. SPJ should focus more on safety of journalists, but not so much on tips for keeping journalists safe, but more of a focus on educating the public on the dangers of practicing journalism. SPJ could focus more on the international journalists/journalism like the Committee to Protect Journalists. This would be a lower priority, but increasing the quality of Quill, in terms of the articles, visuals, paper quality, digital look. Quill is the face of the organization since we are advocating for the quality of writing. **Jennifer Karchmer**

• **Focus:** The question is can SPJ do it all. Do we have to pick one path or the other? When you’re a membership organization you have to focus on members or chapters, so if you focus on members you can’t focus on media literacy or advocacy. The organizations that don’t have members and chapters can focus more on the mission or journalism. He’s fine with whichever way it goes. Membership organizations are not a growing industry. If that’s what we want to do, then we shouldn’t worry when membership numbers decrease because that’s just what’s happening. We could focus on membership or we could shift gears and fill gaps that need filled. The open lane is advocacy and public education. We can take that and run with it or we can let someone else do it.
  
  o **What would an advocacy focus look like:** Moving headquarters to D.C., shifting resources to public education and adding a lobbyist to the staff. Doing this would mean taking resources away from somewhere else. SPJ could also give other groups help in other missions and causes. We need to know what we’re good at and go all in. We’d have to bring in more money and make our mission clear. We can keep membership and chapters, but we just wouldn’t focus on building it. It would also mean getting rid of the delegate system. **Dave Cuillier**

• SPJ needs to become more like the industry is now and find the people who are doing the journalism in the places that are growing. Lots of these little organizations have memberships and serve their members because SPJ failed to meet the needs of those people back then. The committees have a way to meet those needs much more than geography, or chapters. The geography model doesn’t work, because subject matters and interest areas don’t depend on geography. SPJ should remodel to focus on what people do in terms of journalism, because then they’ll be more engaged and willing to renew their dues. **Bob Becker**
• SPJ should not be worried about in-fighting if they’re fighting about the right thing. SPJ is a democracy where things should be debated, and we need to ask ourselves does SPJ look like America. We should think about what this country will look like and what we will talk about when discussing inequality, poverty and government transparency. SPJ should think about how it can be different from the rest of the industry.
  o **How could SPJ help younger journalists:** We need to stop thinking about younger journalists as a statistic and demographic. SPJ needs to be thinking about dedicating entire chapters to younger journalists. Not only thinking about offering scholarships and mentorship opportunities, but also offering online databases and chatrooms where people can meet more than once a year. **Tim Gruver**

• The problem facing our industry is diversity, equity and inclusion, who covers the news and if they look like the rest of Americans. News literacy should not be SPJ’s focus because there are other groups already doing that. **Suzanne McBride**

• One-on-one communication with members is important. SPJ should reach out to chapters for help. She is doing a mentorship program at the state-level but suggested starting a mentorship program on a national level as well. SPJ should share good ideas that members and chapters have and the work that our members are doing. LDF is extremely important and why I love SPJ. Hearing people’s actual stories about how they were helped is good. It’s important to find money in other ways besides just members. Do this advocacy work we want to see more of. **Jennifer Ellis**

**Advocacy:**
• Anti-discrimination, racism, bullying, harassment. **Shirley Tang**
• SPJ should increase the focus on media literacy to build trust and show real news vs actually fake news. **Garth Bishop**
• The First Amendment and ethics. **Ginny Frizzi**

**Partnerships:**
• Reporters Committee. **Shirley Tang**
• Likes partnering with NAHJ and groups like that. SPJ should focus more diversity and outreach to those groups. **Sal Morales**
• It is good to partner with RTDNA and NAHJ. SPJ should partner more with groups like the environmental journalists to do specific programs. They have more bang for the buck and might be able to do specific programs with SPJ. **Ginny Frizzi**
• SPJ could work with Electronic Frontier Foundation or the Public Library Association for media literacy efforts. **Dan Mika**
• Student Press Law Center, especially to help with outreach to students. Maybe the Committee to Protect Journalists. **Jennifer Karchmer**
- The smaller organizations don’t need to exist. SPJ should say we can meet your needs and maybe you should join us. We’d have to say our old model doesn’t work and we need to restructure and focus to what our industry needs. **Bob Becker**
- SPJ should partner with the ACLU and the NAACP. SPJ should also partner with journalists of color, LGBTQ people, immigrants and poor journalists. **Tim Gruver**
- SPJ should partner with more diversity organizations like NABJ, NAHJ Asian American Journalists Association and LGBTQ journalists, as well as LION (Local Independent Online News) Publishers. **Suzanne McBride**
- New Voices and the Student Press Law Center. The partnerships we have with other organizations already are good. SPJ should partner more with organizations that bring more diversity like NABJ. SPJ could also partner with Investigative Reporters and Editors so people can learn how to dive into investigative reporting. SPJ should also partner with anyone focused on ethics or the First Amendment. SPJ doesn’t just have to partner with journalism organizations. It’s about telling our own stories and how we do our jobs and focusing on all those things that help build trust, which might mean working with Trusting News. **Jennifer Ellis**

**Big ideas:**

- Interested in Dave Cullier’s idea and would like to do that but maintain a membership model. We are known for our chapter system. Is there a way to do both? **Patti Newberry**
- Dave hit the nail on the head. People can agree there’s a big need for journalism advocacy, that’s where we should head. Florida did a good thing with the Fake NewsTM campaign. SPJ doesn’t have to get rid of membership and by doing more advocacy we could increase membership. If we did that we’d have to lessen our other things and just be known for one thing. SPJ wouldn’t have to move everyone just have one staff member based in D.C. **Haisten Willis**
- Need to reach out to journalists in need but that doesn’t seem to go along with focusing on advocacy. Agree with Haisten about Fake NewsTM, and would like to see more groups like that working together in a large way for a common cause and creativity and finding new ways to reach out to people. Community is good. Is SPJ going to be an organization of members or will SPJ be an organization to lead the way for journalism? SPJ should focus more on members. Either we’re a society (meaning primarily member focused) or not. **Hazel Becker**
- Consider the idea of a president with multiple terms with an annual election to keep the democratic process. This would allow for more consistency. **Jonathan Make**
Oct. 29 student member focus group

Likes:

- Biggest student journalism organization on campus, networking, knows people/has gotten internships through SPJ. **Emily Waldenberg**
- Going to a conference and seeing people from juggernauts in the industry and being with them. **Brianne Hendricks**
- The conferences. They are a pull to get students to join SPJ, especially because the university helps pay for the executive board to go to conferences. **Vaughn Golden**
- SPJ teaches you how to be an ethical journalist and provides teaching resources. **Peggy Sue Wood** (post-grad member)

Dislikes/improvements:

- On campus it’s hard to drum up membership. **Brianne Hendricks**
- Feels like there’s a gap between them and other student chapters, or SPJ in general. Doesn’t feel students are really involved in the decision making. **Vaughn Golden**
- SPJ seems inaccessible, even with a local chapter seems difficult to reach into that grouping. People have all been there awhile and seem to know each other. From a student standpoint, professors didn’t talk about it other than Code of Ethics. There needs to be more advertising on a student standpoint.
  - **How to be more welcoming:** invitation for new members or young professionals to join on a more social point, like a local bar or restaurant
    **Peggy Sue Wood**

When you think of SPJ:

- Networking, time to bring students together from SPJ and other student journalism organizations, hosts movie nights and things like that. **Emily Waldenberg**
- Networking **Brianne Hendricks**
- It’s a great resource for book knowledge or knowledge about journalism. It should be a better networking opportunity. When living in New York City it seemed like you needed to have a membership but that no one seemed very involved. **Peggy Sue Wood**

Partnerships:
• National Press Photographers Association. It helps to broaden students’ horizons and help connect them to people who aren’t interested in more traditional journalism like broadcasting. **Emily Waldenberg**

**Focus:**

• A post-grad or young journalist group, maybe on Facebook or another social media platform, could offer a forum for open discussion or a place where people could reach out to each other. Facebook would be a good channel, with Slack a message can get lost, but more people are on Facebook and checking it more often. **Emily Waldenberg**

• SPJ should be a one stop shop for young journalist on the website, with more things like the recent Facebook webinar, especially remote webinars. Those kinds of things fill in where we’re lacking in training from our colleges. **Brianne Hendricks**

• Use LinkedIn more. SPJ should promote its LinkedIn more because it gives people who would never have had a chance to meet a chance to meet. **Joseph Maronski**

• It can be hard to get students to show up to programming and they might not have a presence in webinars. Networking is good. Students get jobs through Facebook groups so an SPJ group like that would be beneficial. Stick to ethics, stick to SPJ’s base, don’t deviate too far from that. **Vaughn Golden**

• More interactive newsletter, it seems very dry. More about meetings at a local level. It would be good to offer a panel or chance to meet with recent graduates. Online opportunities are what people turn to; they’re go-to places for learning journalism. The webinars are good and the ability to watch at a later date is really helpful.
  - **Website structure:** It’s easy if you know what keyword to use for the search bar but the drop-down menu is really extensive and you get lost. **Peggy Sue Wood**

**Advocacy:**

• Code of Ethics; it’s a first exposure for people to SPJ. Advocacy could focus on ethics. It is a good building block. SPJ should be an advocacy group. **Emily Waldenberg**

• Focus on local newspapers. Highlight them and what they do well. **Brianne Hendricks**

• SPJ should involve young professionals and students in advocacy efforts. If we talk to Congress, we should have members participate, not just a lobbyist. **Joseph Maronski**

• Focus on local journalism. Advocate for local journalism and work to get folks involved. **Vaughn Golden**

• Focus on ethics and maintaining journalistic standards. Journalists lose attention when people are entering workplaces and focusing on too much. People are
reading op-eds more than news stories. We need to get back to straight news. EIJ highlights the importance of news but we should also bring it up more in discussions. **Peggy Sue Wood**

**Big ideas:**

- Have a campus representative or ambassador, who is given about $20 a month to print Code of Ethics and distribute them around campus or promote events – sounds like this would be a professional member. **Emily Waldenberg**
- Would like to be able to be in contact with more people one or two years out of college who could speak to chapters. Suggested a student take-over of SPJ’s social media. **Emily Waldenberg**
- Have a webinar every week or every other week. **Brianne Hendricks**
- Facebook may have a way to do mentorships through the platform. **Brianne Hendricks**
- A mentorship program would be amazing (matching members of professional chapters with student journalists in the same areas based on medium of interest, area of interest, etc). University chapters have a hard time engaging students, but if membership could result in something tangible like a professional mentor or relationship would be a huge motivator. **Emma Scher**
- Emily’s idea about an ambassador program is good. It would be good to put faces to names. It’s good to learn about SPJ on campus because it’s the best time to get involved and learn about the organization, and if they don’t learn about it on campus then they may not seek it out after. SPJ should touch base with more chapters and see what they need. **Joseph Maronski**
- Some professional, local journalists have asked about getting involved with the college chapter. It could be good to lump professionals without a chapter into student chapter. They’re always looking for people to come physically to speak or chime in on a Google Hangout. A directory of journalists who are SPJ members and willing to interface with students either on the web or physically would be great. Maybe some people could have some funding from national to come to campuses. **Vaughn Golden**
- Cost is a big factor and convincing students to get a membership. It can be hard to pitch even the discounted price of $100 for four years. It might be good to look at ways to sponsor a student. The Netflix model might work, but $6-10 a month is too much, but having a lower yearly price would be beneficial. **Vaughn Golden**
- SPJ should have more merchandise. The honors society she was a part of had merchandise and it helped it get bigger and have more advertising across campus. Her ideas for more merchandise include sweatshirts and tumbler cups. What drew me in was the Code of Ethics that got passed out in classes. **Peggy Sue Wood**

**EIJ:**
• It can be difficult to get people to skip class to go to EIJ because it was the first week of classes and cost is a factor for those who don’t get subsidies for hotels and flights. Felt like there was a gap between student and professional members at EIJ.
  o **Timing:** Early October
  o **Programming Ideas:** A student mixer or dinner **Emily Waldenberg**
• Some of the more popular panels were full, especially ones that would be interesting for a young person like producing a podcast cheaply or using Instagram Stories.
  o **Programming Ideas:** A way to learn new skills. Because she attends a small university, they mostly focus on writing so she has learned most her multimedia skills from SPJ.
  o **Timing:** late September/Early October **Brianne Hendricks**
• Good if members of a chapter’s executive board go to EIJ and put together a presentation about what they learned for those who don’t go. Networking is good.
  o **Programming ideas:** Young professional panel with people in a variety of career paths including freelance, “young professionals in the communication or journalism industry”
  o **Timing:** This year EIJ was the second week of classes so it’s a quick turnaround, late September or early October would be better. **Joseph Maronski**
• University help with travel costs is key.
  o **Timing:** The end of September would be easier, but not near election season. March is also a good time.
  o **Programming:** Workshops are intriguing. His favorite event was Casper Project panel. The critique sessions are good. The job fair is a huge draw. **Vaughn Golden**

**Reaching out to high school students**
• There’s great stuff happening at the high school level. A good way to involve them is to tell them that journalism is an option and a career path. **Brianne Hendricks**
• Honor societies can offer practically free membership for high school students. SPJ could offer scholarships for applying to college and emphasize how being a member will look on a college resume. SPJ could open membership to high school students and emphasize that they can use as a resource to teach themselves. **Peggy Sue Wood**
• Another college chapter puts on programs with local high schools, including media literacy and some focused more on mentoring or writing. Just getting journalists in the classroom to see what a journalist looks like could be beneficial. A pipeline might not be there but it’s good to keep in mind, just maybe not a big priority. **Vaughn Golden**
• It’s important to realize that’s a vulnerable group of students that are impressionable. SPJ could show them what a journalist does and where you can go in the field. It might help grow field and help with representation of journalism.
Getting faces out there makes a vast difference, whether we get high school newspaper students to be members, it’d be good to get in there, in person or with materials, and just show what SPJ or journalism in general is. Just getting out there to high schools makes a world of difference. These are students who aren’t getting the view of journalism so educating them is important. Joseph Maronski
Nov. 6 SPJ member focus group

Likes:

- Google News Lab and Facebook Journalism Project resources, national conferences; both help them drive membership. SPJ’s mission, its focus on advocacy and media literacy. **Annie Culver**
- The educational seminars offered locally, the educational Quill articles about the craft of writing. Really like having Quill as a magazine rather than online only. **Linda Delmonico Prussen**
- EIJ panel on how to apply skills to philanthropy, EIJ as a whole. Is impressed with how thoughtful the organization is being with the strategic plan. **Theola DeBose**

Dislikes/improvements:

- Need better contact between regional coordinators and chapters. Would love for national to help regional leaders with getting out information, managing deadlines and more communication. Can be confusing to register for the local chapter on the website, but when people are engaged with their local chapters they’re more likely to renew their subscription. Regional leaders should have more goals and meetings. National should provide an easy way for chapters to have websites within the national site, for example it would be spj.org/chaptername. There should also be an easy way to send email blasts and have a system where the list automatically updates. Additional local information on the main SPJ website. Would like to have chapter leaders personally call members who are up for renewal. **Annie Culver**
- More information for freelancers. Have ads in Quill for places looking for freelancers. **Linda Delmonico Prussen**

Focus:

- More on freelancing and education on what is reputable journalism. You can’t hold people accountable, because it’s not that kind of organization, but more articles and educational seminars on doing journalism would be helpful. **Linda Delmonico Prussen**
- No journalism organization is focusing on helping people transitioning out of journalism, but SPJ should lead the way in giving people those resources. There should be year-round conversations about this. SPJ also should give freelancers templates and business strategies to help them manage the business side of freelancing. Just let the chapters do their own thing. **Theola DeBose**
• Entrepreneurship mentorship within the journalistic space, including help with getting ads, Google tools and getting interns directly from colleges. She was involved in #Press4Education and it was helpful because she was able to connect with college professors and build her network. Suggested a Google group for sharing internship opportunities with universities. **Lourdes Mestre**

**Advocacy:**

• Focus on diversity, journalism knowledge in the community. **Annie Culver**
• SPJ could have an advocacy calendar. It could include things like when the printing press was invented and other dates important to journalists. It would be a way to celebrate journalism. By celebrating the smaller things, you build trust for when you need to advocate for the big things. **Theola DeBose**
• Hold the right people accountable when it comes to fake news. Social media is media and SPJ should hold them accountable for fake ads and fake news on their sites. Expand the Code of Ethics to include social media networks as news outlets. Advocacy program for print media to make sure that people recycle newspapers and magazines and that they are made from recycled materials. Printing should be environmentally conscious. **Lourdes Mestre**

**Partnerships:**

• Really partner with anyone who wants to partner and is within our ethical guidelines for the partnership. Partner with media companies and ask them to pay for memberships for journalists at their stations. **Annie Culver**
• American Society of Journalists and Authors **Linda Delmonico Prussen**
• NAHJ was unique. More partnerships like that would be good because all organizations and journalists are going through the same thing. The training piece of SPJ/EIJ could be very attractive to partners. NABJ is not as good at training but they are really good at advocacy so we could help each other. **Theola DeBose**
• Google is an excellent example of a tech company that helps journalists. More tools on solidifying a positive news environment for journalists who are running sites on their own, helping with things like preventing hacks. Any other partnership to help train journalists. **Lourdes Mestre**

**Big ideas:**

• Expanded media literacy and training, perhaps by redesigning the website. SPJ could have a website like hotels.com but with workshops and grants where you can search, book it and add it to your calendar. SPJ could also have a mentor
program for members that match mentors with others in their areas of focus or with students that is facilitated through SPJ’s website. Having something designed for chapters that highlights different events you can do would be nice.

**Annie Culver**
- Would love to hear Theola speak somewhere because she had good information.

**Linda Delmonico Prussen**
- Highlight and celebrate journalism and journalists more. For example, doing member profiles on Instagram, which would also show we’re a thriving organization and will give people hope, and her earlier idea of the calendar. Expand training a little more to teach journalists about marketing. **Theola DeBose**
- More information on further ways to lateralize one’s income. **Lourdes Mestre**
- The idea of having more training opportunities for freelancers or journalists running their own business is good. Could happen via Google Hangout or at EIJ. **April Bethea**
Attachment A

We received about two dozen written responses to a pre-focus group survey. Here are the answers, with top-level thoughts in bold.

1. What comes to mind when you think of SPJ?

The good (fellowship, empowerment, ethics, advocacy and networking)

A group of journalists joining hands and brains together to help each other.

Standing for, representing and defending freedom of the press

An organization designed to empower journalists

The ethics code generally, and on a personal level, networking.

Ethical journalism

Good journalism

Professionalism

Professional networking

A national organization of journalists

professional industry (trade) association

I think of an organization that promotes the truth telling and embodiment of what it means to be a journalist.

A professional organization which allows individuals to grow their network while learning more about the field of journalism

The number 1 journalism group in the U.S. whose mission ought to be the primary clearinghouse for all things journalism, especially re ethics, improving journalism,
teaching news literacy and building public trust, being active in producing original research that provides practical usefulness for journalists, and finding jobs.

Journalism, conferences and fellowship

Conferences, chapter programming

Advocacy regarding First Amendment rights and government transparency. Litigation to protect the media’s right to gather and disseminate news. News media ethics. Mentoring students and young adults engaged in or planning to engage in journalism. Training to improve news gathering and reporting skills.

Good friends (that’s only half the story, though – it’s built on many years of working together toward common goals of telling stories people need and want to know)

FOIA, public access

Advocacy and training for journalists

Journalism watchdog/keeper of the flame

First Amendment Rights, supporting working and student journalists

The bad

Late-career, salaried East Coast journalists

A group that used to be focused on developing skills for journalists

The ugly

I used to have incredible regard for SPJ and thought it stood for excellence in journalism, but in the past two years it has morphed into just another tabloid-esque entity with incredible bias. I volunteered to judge an SPJ student competition recently and was completely appalled by the political slant in a few standard news pieces. The college advisor should not have allowed these to push through the competition. I may be an "elder" now as I graduated from J-school in 1989, but I was never taught or encouraged to "create news" as a reporter. Where did the word/thought/requirement of "balance" go?
2. What should SPJ be known for in the future?

tl;dr: advocacy, diversity, inclusivity, innovation, education, ethics

Journalism advocacy

Advocating for and assisting journalists in need of journalistic help.

Promotion of journalism in public space

Promoting diversity in journalism

Being inclusive for all "new" forms of journalism

Freelancer friendly

Good journalism

Defense of journalists and journalism.

innovation/education; beyond journalism

Innovation, cutting-edge learning and fun!

A group that focuses on developing skills for journalists

For shaping the reform of journalism while informing individuals of ethics

Bringing together journalists who work in all media, regardless of whether they are employed by news outlets, freelance for those outlets, or use technology to self-disseminate news.

Developing aspiring journalists and journalism school graduates, setting them on a career path towards watchdog reporting and fighting for fair pay in the industry.

SPJ should absolutely stand for objectivity and balance in every single thing it does - from an editorial in its magazine, blog or when investing in the future of journalism through the students who are excited to learn more about this career or even try and
make a living in it! SPJ should be the Platinum standard - forget about the Gold. I remember when I was in college and our student SPJ awards night would honor the best of the best stories than ran that year. I am not encouraged with the "cut/paste" and celebrity fatigue stories that are being chased by many news entities. Where did the original story or unique lead go?

Helping professional journalists do professional journalism.

SPJ should be the country’s premier professional journalism organization that trains journalists, educates the public about the importance of a free press and builds support among everyday Americans for journalism.

Still journalism advocacy and training, but also media literacy

Networking

I think SPJ should be known in the future in a broader sense of anyone looking to break into the media world.

The number 1 journalism group in the U.S. whose mission ought to be the primary clearinghouse for all things journalism, especially re ethics, improving journalism, teaching news literacy and building public trust, being active in producing original research that provides practical usefulness for journalists, and finding jobs.
Same as above plus fighter for truth, accuracy

First Amendment Rights, supporting community understanding and support of journalism, journalist training

3. Which other journalism groups do you belong to? What do you like about them? Which journalism groups should SPJ partner with in the future?

SPJ is the only journalism group I joined. I think SPJ should partner with Reporters Committee.

NLGJA. I like that this group promotes diversity, especially in other mediums of journalism. SPJ should partner with this group in the future.
Press Club of Western Pennsylvania. Women’s Press Club of Pittsburgh, Financial Writers of New York City, National Federation of Press Women. These represent my interests, with the first two being local, which are especially valuable for local contacts. I am a member of the Atlanta Press Club, which has a broader focus with more PR and business people. It’s a different vibe and a good change of pace. Our chapter (SPJ Georgia) has partnered with APC many times and will continue to do so. We’ve also partnered with AAJA, NAHJ and NABJ, and I’m hoping we’ll work with them more in the future.

**NAHJ, feeling of community**

Belong to: IRE, AEJMC, NFOIC, others. They are run by professional staff with supportive big-picture boards and most importantly, clear missions. They know what their lane is, stay in it and own it. The bigger question is what organizations do I support that do NOT have members - that I give money to, follow and believe in, even though I am not a "member". The list of those organizations is much longer (e.g., RCFP, First Amendment Coalition of Arizona, NMFOG, Adventure Rider Radio podcast, and many more). We might need to re-adjust our thinking - think bigger than membership organizations, than what we know. **Lots of partnership potential, in and out of journalism, nonprofits, academic, commercial - literally hundreds of groups.**

National Communications Association, New York Women in Communication

What is a “journalism group”? Do open government coalitions, the Reporters Committee, etc., qualify? If yes, I am a member of the D.C. Open Government Coalition. SPJ has partnered with the National Freedom of Information Coalition, and it has joined state coalitions in advocating for improved Freedom of Information and Open Meetings acts. SPJ should partner with many **more narrowly focused groups of journalists, including the Society of Environmental Journalists, the National Association of Science Writers, the Society of American Business Editors and Writers, etc.**

I participate with SPJ Oregon. I enjoy the diversity of journalists it has and its trainings. I wish SPJ could partner with the **ACLU and NAACP.**

I joined San Diego Press Club but I don't participate at all and will likely not renew. SPJ suits me but I wish it would offer more informal gatherings or social occasions to create networking opportunities and make new friends. I don't need to RSVP to a night-time workshop that is really catered to college kids. I would rather participate in a webinar or workshop that is accepting of all generations. As for strengthening partnerships in the
future, I think it would be crucial to share space with copyright attorneys and libel specialists given the rampant use of social media and firestorms that have been created through Twitter, et al.

I don't belong to other groups - and the only one I joined was Virginia Press Women's Association, in the early 1970s. I think SPJ should partner with groups that represent segments of journalists - by subject matter, mediums, type of work, so-called "affinity" groups (whether by race, regional origin, gender, or other)

LION Publishers, IRE, ONA and AEJMC. I think all of these groups could be potential partners. What I like most is the specialized training each provides.

I'm not part of any other groups, but at this point, I think it's worthwhile to pursue collaborations with any other journalism groups, if only to look for opportunities.

I'm a member of IRE and ONA. I would love to see SPJ partner with IRE in the future! Center for Communication. The Center for Communication is educational.

Longtime member of American Society of Business Publication Editors (ASBPE) and former executive director, associate director, board member, and chair of its committees on ethics, research, awards, and conference programming.

Belonged to National Student Newspaper Association and journalism teachers assoc prior to retirement. Yes, SPJ should partner with them.

Front Page Foundation (501C3 local arm of East Tenn. Pro Chapter)

4. What turns you on or off about SPJ? What would make you proud of the organization? If you have a specific problem with SPJ, how can we solve it?

I would be proud of SPJ if it really helps journalists to fight issues such as racism, bullying, and discrimination through record requests. When I tried to investigate complaints of these issues through filing public record requests to OCR and local school district, I have run into many roadblocks when they withheld public records or wrongfully redacted records. I have nowhere to turn other than to get a lawyer. And I am hesitant to do that no knowing if I will win the case and get my legal fees back.

SPJ pretends to promote diversity, but I hardly can tell. SPJ has a diversity fellowship designed to provide opportunities for diverse journalists to attend EIJ.
However, the SPJ falls back on its old notions of journalism (print & TV broadcast) when it considers a candidates merit. Not one of the diversity fellows was a podcaster, a radio journalist, or an online magazine journalist. Moreover, the fellowship only allows for 6 participants. With all the money chapters donate to SPJ, and with how expensive dues have become, 6 diversity fellows is all SPJ could afford? I find that hard to believe. Moreover, **EIJ is way too expensive.** I have been trying to attend since 2015 when I joined SPJ. But I couldn't afford the registration let alone the airfare, room and board for the conference. And I am not the only person that has had this problem.

**The headquarters turnover is disturbing for several reasons**, including the resulting difficulty in serving chapters and members (which is a real problem). It also projects the image that it is a poorly run professional organization, which doesn't inspire confidence. I would be proud to have SPJ solidify headquarters and have it and local chapters work to get membership to begin growing.

What I enjoy most is the opportunity to get to know other journalists outside my immediate circle of influence and geographic area. I am a freelancer, and consider SPJ members to be my "coworkers," providing **social opportunities** I might otherwise miss.

**The biggest turnoff is when there is infighting.** To an extent, I think that comes with the territory of volunteer groups, but I feel it may be curtailed a bit if SPJ more clearly defines its mission and what the organization is working to accomplish. It makes me proud when SPJ fights for journalism."  

**Perceived lack of hispanic diversity**

I am proud of SPJ. I believe in it and always have since I became a member in 1986 in college. However, SPJ's growth/future is hobbled, ironically, by the same members, who join in college, participate in chapters or committees, and then become board members governing the organization. Not our fault, because we are indoctrinated early on, and that is all we know for what SPJ was, is and should be. It will be difficult for members to accept significant change, even if it means ending a structural model that has run its course, and embrace a whole new focus, structure and mission. For example, it is unlikely members would end the **delegate system, the membership system, and chapters**. But all three of those factors are **dying models that are killing the organization very slowly.** Membership drives and gimmicks make us feel better, but won't save the organization long-term. This isn't just SPJ, or even in journalism - it's what is happening in the nonprofit world throughout the United States. The successful ones are evolving, shifting from the old model to new models. The dying organizations
are not changing. It is very difficult for organizations to basically kill themselves or their long-held structures/practices to emerge stronger. But if SPJ wants to survive, that is what it needs to do.

**Higher profile**, esp. when journalists are under assault by elected officials

The first question is a **dangerous** one to ask in light of what has occurred over the past year. Right now there is not much that turns me on about SPJ, and much of what has taken place is a major turn-off. Setting aside the internecine board battle, the fight over EIJ sponsorships is truly depressing because it demonstrates how little some of our members understand about democracy and free speech. The second question is easier. If SPJ could convince one or more media associations like those listed above to become a part of the Society, rather than operating as an independent entity, that would make me very **proud** of SPJ. The third is also easier. The board includes members who championed the restructuring. If they truly believed in the goals of that endeavor, they need to **step back** from managing the many things SPJ does, including the convention, and delegate those tasks to others. Then the board would have the time and energy to do what the restructuring intended, plan for the future of the Society and journalism in general.

**The decision by SPJ to accept monetary sponsorship by Fox News** at EIJ 2019, misconduct by its top-ranked members towards freelancers, **lack of diversity** and inclusion, no networking opportunities, mentorships, or career pathways for freelancers and disadvantaged journalism school graduates.

Working with the Sunlight Foundation and Lynn Walsh in 2018, I was underpaid for my work and paid three months late with no contract or explanation for why my story was not posted. Moreover, I was not given any means of communication throughout the process. **The organization was not forthcoming** for what was going on. I am disappointed a former SPJ president could act this way towards another journalist.

**SPJ got too erudite.** How's that for a big word? But that's how the magazine would read and occasional email blasts received in my inbox. SPJ should be a trusted source, a close confidante to journalists and journalism-friendly folks. I registered years ago on your freelance site and it is so clumsy and complicated. It's embarrassing, really - plus no one can really help at the organizational level in how to update it, etc. The member resources should be super user-friendly and intuitive so that we can be independent as well without being spoon-fed by the larger organization all the time. It feels so "top down" and not linear and transparent in terms of communication from SPJ leadership.
I am downright **disgusted and exhausted with all the bickering**, behind-the-scenes machinations, and sometimes downright nastiness of some factions among SPJers who are active on the national level. Some members of the board behave like toddlers, stamping their feet when they don’t get their way. On an operational level, this seems to continue to keep board votes from ever deciding anything. My advice is: if your faction loses a vote in the board, move on. Don’t start an email thread that seems to have no other intent than to overturn a decision just made at a board meeting. If one year’s board or committee leaders set policies, don’t overturn them the next year – don’t keep plugging away at the same thing all the time.

**I would like SPJ to have a larger presence in the public arena.** And SPJ needs to make sure it’s following the highest ethics and principles.

**More visible advocacy efforts would help** (visible for nonmembers; they’re already visible to me). Successful efforts to improve media literacy would make me proud, since so many people struggle with it. And I’m sure I’m not the only one who thinks the organization needs to do a better job of reaching young people and newcomers to the profession, though how to do that is the real question.

**Ridiculous egos**, few big-name members, lack of collaboration (chapter to chapter and regionally), **website is a mess**, lack of diversity in mediums. Sharper op-eds, smarter business decisions

**There seems to be a wide gap between SPJ pro and student members.** Not in the sense of alienation but rather that there’s a large age difference. At EIJ, I felt there was a large gap between the age in students there versus pro members.

**Some of the panels at the last conference were pretty dated.** You could tell the panels everyone wanted to be at because the rooms were packed. The Instagram story panel, and the podcasting panel was standing room only, some of the other panels had maybe 5 audience members.

Like most of the mainstream media, **SPJ has gotten very political.** SPJ can stop focusing on politics and back to teaching fair reporting.

Learning more about my field while growing my network is a benefit. I would be proud of SPJ if they spearheaded a **reform**.
Turnoff: How the Georgia chapter does such a poor job getting journalists all over the state engaged. The Georgia chapter is really ONLY an Atlanta chapter (competing with the Atlanta Press Club and who knows who else) considering its programs and lack of outreach. Savannah Georgia is a minimum 4-hour drive to Atlanta where previous meetings have been. Few people will ever drive to Atlanta for anything. I tried to enlist the SPJ regional coordinators to support a Southeast Georgia chapter, but they were not much help. In fact, I created a database of 300+ journalists who work within 2 hours of Savannah and who could be potential members of a Southeast Georgia chapter. That did not entice the regional coordinators either. Isn’t SPJ losing members?

1. **Dues are expensive for me**—re fixed income. 2. **SPJ voice not loud enough** in fighting “fake news” and supporting accurate reporting.

Fighting and weird emails I get. Some of the votes didn't seem applicable. **The website is hard to navigate as a chapter leader.** Additionally, I haven't had strong regional leadership up until now.

5. **What should SPJ do that it is not doing now?**

    **tl;dr:** Promote diversity, stabilize HQ, greater advocacy, better promotion, outreach to students. Also some disagreement: End chapters! Support chapters!

I don't know, because I do not have a full picture of what SPJ is doing.

Promote Diversity

Solidify headquarters staff. Hopefully, this will begin to happen when the new executive director of hired. When that is done, new initiatives can begin.

SPJ is doing advocacy, but I think there is a big opportunity to do it on a bigger scale and make it a larger part of the organization's focus.

address concerns of seasoned professionals

End the delegate system, end the focus on members and end chapters. All of those limit impact and revenues, and distract from the mission - to improve journalism. If journalists in a particular town want to get together and talk journalism and have a beer, great. But those groups should not drive the organization's activities. It's a 100-plus-year-old model that does not work today. Look at the successful organizations - RCFP, CPJ, etc. - they focus on the mission, not members/chapters. Then, after shifting to a structural
model that has a future, identify a lane SPJ can move into and own it. Crowded lanes are training, litigation, FOI, and diversity. Open lanes are educating and lobbying the public and politicians for professional journalism. Can still keep the ethics thing going, since that is part of "professional" journalism, but move away from FOI, diversity, training, and chapter/member activities. Much more can be accomplished by shifting resources.

More aggressive promotion about what journalism and what journalists do, and how they are trained.

SPJ needs to be far more aggressive in funding research for new business models. See last question.

outreach for faculty

Reorganize the membership structure so that it is more focused on members’ areas of interest, beats, and job/professional functions, and less on geography. Left to its own devices, the chapter structure likely will wither because too many members live and work far from their nearest chapters. But if SPJ focuses on communities that provide professional development, mentoring and support for members’ job needs — i.e. legal/criminal justice reporting, business/economic reporting, regional/community news, special projects/data journalism — maybe it can keep current members engaged and willing to stay, and bring some of those smaller, more focused associations in.

Recruiting journalists

SPJ should have the local community feel as well as the larger national presence. A member can rely on receiving the magazine and offerings from the Big Office but also share in meetings or community events at the local level. The two should be symbiotic but they are quite disjointed.

Figure out how to engage members (and perhaps nonmembers) in a push to help them keep being journalists in this crazy journalism-industry upheaval. Translated: if we're going to continue to be a membership organization (which I believe we should), focus on the members. That doesn't mean to stop doing things members think are important - free press, transparent government, ethics in journalism - but it does mean finding out what members (perhaps particularly unaffiliated ones) need and helping them get it.
I don't think SPJ needs to add any specific endeavors, it just needs to make them more visible. Greater emphasis on individual success stories, greater emphasis of the Code of Ethics and how to follow it.

Prioritizing student chapter growth and retention. Building chapters with local news orgs.

Encourage more people to continue to be engaged in SPJ right after graduation and throughout their careers.

Contacting more journalism professors to help with outreach with students.

Go back to teaching fair reporting and new skills. Have a section devoted to publications and news outlets looking for freelancers and publish their guidelines for submissions.

Increase interaction with member students who are seeking to join the journalism field

See above. Moreover, I've tried to volunteer on several committees, but was turned down every time.

Build stronger national voice, partner with ACLU to expose/fight attacks on truth including major outlets like Fox News. Create national ombudsman/woman to promote facts, keep everyone truthful and educate public.

Support local chapters more with more resources. Have regional leaders have goals and set regular meetings with chapter leaders. Redo website to make it easier for chapters to send out email blasts to members.

6. If SPJ focused more on advocacy, what specific types should it focus on? 
   tl;dr: professional journalism, local journalism, public trust, press freedoms, media literacy, diversity issues, open government and public access

   SPJ should advocate against racism, bullying, and discrimination.

Why local journalism matters

Promoting LGBTQ+ journalism

First Amendment issues. SPJ must be the leader in advocating for all related issues. One is lobbying, both in Washington and in state capitols. Of course this is something SPJ does now and has done in the past, but I think there is an opportunity and a need
for us to do it even more, for example in support of bills like the Open and Responsive Government Act of 2019. The other one to me is doing all we can to get our advocacy work into news outlets and getting noticed that way. SPJ Florida's campaign to trademark the term "Fake News" was brilliant. The last idea would be maybe having the national president or executive director make regular appearances on cable news shows.

spj should not advocate politics or personal agendas

1) Advocating for professional journalism. Public education campaigns to improve public support for good journalism. Actually calling out bad actors, including bad journalism. I know many have been reluctant to do that, wondering who can be the arbiter of "good journalism" - nobody wants to be the good journalism police. But somebody should do that today, and better that it be SPJ than the government or some partisan yahoo organizations that emerge to fill that void (e.g., Media Matters, Media Research Center, news councils). It would not be a big leap for SPJ to go all in on this and own the lane, given its strong reputation for focusing on ethics. RCFP is likely to move into the public education realm for press freedom. That is OK - SPJ can still own the public education realm for "good journalism."

2) Lobbying for press freedom in D.C. RCFP is shifting all of its resources to litigation, moving away from coordinating press freedom lobbying in D.C. News Media for Open Government (formerly SGI, coordinated by Rick Blum) is no more. The journalism groups are now going to informally coordinate as best they can, which is unlikely to be effective. That leaves an opening for some group (in D.C.) to coordinate journalism groups in press freedom issues, including FOIA, press freedom, PIO issues, attacks from the White House, shield law, etc. It is a huge gap that just opened up. SPJ could own it, or it could be filled by another group, such as News Leaders Association (formerly ASNE). Frankly, I don't care who does it, but somebody has to do it, and it is an opportunity for SPJ, if SPJ moves quickly enough, and with focused determination.

Rebuttals.

Teaching media literacy, especially to older adults. There's generations of people who grew up before the internet and are especially susceptible to false information spread by malicious actors. These people vote. They're a major portion of our democracy. Our profession is based on spreading truthful information, so let's help people find that good information and eschew the bad.

Freedom of the Press; Independent
First Amendment, FOIA, open meetings, opposition to legislation that hampers news gathering, confidential source protection.

Unionization, equal pay, collective bargaining rights, freelance workshopping, mentorship, journalism graduate assistance

Media ignores the elderly in our country and it's shameful. As an organization, we should be inclusive to all generations - not just focus on the Millennials or Digital Natives. There is a place at the table for all generations. Also, as a freelancer, I have been ripped off more times than I would like to mention. It is perfectly acceptable for people to use your printed article without permission and not even know about it until it's too late. There should be more support and resources for freelancers to combat this abuse in our industry.

Be on watch for changes to government laws and regulations designed to make our jobs harder to do.

Public access as well as defending the profession and the important work everyday journalists do, especially in small and medium size communities.

Defense against generalized attacks on the media, defense of individual journalists in legal cases etc. If media literacy counts, that too.

Local journalism legal assistance.

Calling media groups out when they don't do their jobs correctly.

Advocacy for hyper-local papers who are struggling. Local news reporting is the heartbeat of our community.

Enough "Advocacy." Have a legal department that could assist journalists if they have questions regarding the legalities in publishing a story.

Ethics, Rights, and Freedom of the Press

Demand that news outlets get their ethics and journalism quality processes in better shape so they can teach news literacy and build trust among the public on the local level.
Free press on high school campuses as well as colleges to maintain student voices. Guidance/warnings to colleagues/journalists when they stray from facts to grab consumers.

I think our biggest problem is the public not understanding or trusting journalism.

7. What is one BIG IDEA you have for SPJ?

Call up each member and ask him/her, "What and how can SPJ help you?"

Helping small newspapers increase circulation and build trust in a community.

It's not original, but SPJ needs to promote itself, what it does and why this work is important. This should take the form of a well planned public relations/information campaign AFTER the new strategic plan is in place and the organization has its proverbial act together.

Advocacy! As a 501(c)(6), rather than a (c)(3), this should be a major focus for SPJ.

Have items on website in Spanish, I can help with this inclusiveness.

Mission No. 1: Win the support of the public and politicians for good journalism. Convince America that journalism is important, necessary, and good. To do this: Sell the Indy building and open up shop in D.C., then dedicate a staff member to coordinate journalism groups in policy work (current SPJ staff members can remain working in Indiana remotely, but gradually shift to D.C. through attrition over time). Add staff to public education and start creating campaigns (would require shifting staff/resources from other duties, including membership/chapter work). Drop training, diversity, and FOI (other than lobbying in D.C.), kill the delegate system, eliminate regional coordinators, let people keep chapters if they want (but don't support them with staff), and let people remain members if they want (but don't put staff resources to it), anticipating that chapters and membership will eventually dissipate, as will happen anyway over time. Focus all efforts on garnering grants and major donations toward the lobbying/education campaign. SPJ (501c6) focuses on the lobbying and its sister organization, SPJ Foundation (501c3), funds the public education component. A bold new move that angers lots of members but provides a clear mission that funders/donors/the public understand and appreciate, and situates the organization on a path that has a successful, impactful future. The current path leads to slow decay,
irrelevancy and no future. Of course, what are the odds leaders and members would actually consider such a thing? Very low, I suspect. But it is in their hands. They can choose to sacrifice their emotional loyalties for the good of journalism (and society!), or cling to their feelings, and doom the organization to an agonizing, protracted death. From the ashes another organization would emerge to fill that lane (or might fill it before SPJ can make the shift). I love SPJ - always have for more than 30 years, and in serving it faithfully as former campus chapter president, FOI chair, national president, foundation board member, First Amendment Fund Forever committee chair, etc. That is why I think it is critical SPJ needs to embark on this new phase, to save itself - and professional journalism - from extinction.

Immediate responses to every media attack leveled by the current administration. And in language as direct as theirs.

A business model accelerator, where media entity startups can try to set up news outlets in underserved areas using different subscription and funding methods or focusing on specific niches that can create the next generation of sustainable outlets.

This is bound to be a controversial opinion, but I think SPJ should also look at supporting newsrooms trying to unionize. The industry has shifted to models that rely on young, criminally underpaid writers pumping out content quickly instead of solid original reporting. We know that model works because the New York Times is surviving as a publicly traded company with that model. SPJ has to advocate for journalists to not only be able to do a job that can threaten those in power, it has to advocate for making sure they can afford a life outside of it.

Grow in the direction of the industry

There may have been a time when many/most journalists came out of J schools. That may still be true for some traditional print and broadcast outlets. But for at least two decades, it has not been true of the sprawling universe of new media entities like Bloomberg, that disseminate news to specific audiences for a fee. Those entities are creating jobs, while traditional media are scaling back. The people those entities hire are more likely to have subject-matter knowledge, not journalism training. Because they didn’t attend J schools, they have never heard of SPJ. Those are the people SPJ needs to find a way to recruit.

A freelance chat room and or database
If journalism is to continue with integrity and class, get into the classrooms by 1st and 2nd grade. That's where the spark will start and may continue through middle school and beyond. It’s too late in college. High school kids (and even some middle school overachievers) are already researching careers and how to make six figure salaries for classes they are taking right now. Offer workshops for the younger kids and camps for the middle schoolers. Internships should be available for high schoolers in 11th and 12th grade. Create local support through partnerships with school districts, libraries or education centers. Make it hip to be a journalist again!

A major summit with as many of the major journalism groups as possible with a focus on a particular issue or problem the industry faces.

Some sort of comprehensive youth outreach effort. Connecting with young, nonmember journalists in ways they'll respond to, and finding out what would make SPJ worthwhile to them.

Reinstate student presence on the board

Formulate a task force that helps seniors in the journalism major stay on track to become a professional, even in the world right now that seems to be discouraging it whether it be fear or money outcomes.

More webinars!

As a journalist, I watch I24 News, Euro News, BBC World News Tonight, Metro Focus, and 60 minutes—though it could ask tougher questions. SPJ and mainstream media should stop looking like a branch of the DNC.

Increasing relations with students

Create national ombudsman/woman to be featured in regular SPJ podcasts and feeds to broadcast/print outlets to set the record straight when reported facts are wrong, ambiguous or misleading.

Redo the website and bring it into the digital age. Allow chapters to run their website off of the national page and have a CRM program for sending email blasts to members. Local chapters are how we will gain membership. We need to do more on the digital front to support them.
Attachment B

On Oct. 26, the pro members offered the following:

Hazel Becker, a Washington, D.C., freelancer, said she belongs to SPJ because of its people and the bonds she’s formed, especially among freelancers. She says we must determine if we want to be an organization of members or an organization focused on leading the way for journalism. She favors the former. She also says we have too much oversight of chapters.

Haisten Willis, a Georgia freelancer, also likes SPJ’s freelance community and networking. He called it “church for brother journalists.” He dislikes “infighting” among board members. He wants to see more advocacy and “fighting” for the profession.

Shirley Tang, who lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, likes collaboration and partnerships, and the focus on helping journalists to achieve goals. She wants to focus on preventing discrimination, racism and bullying.

Garth Bishop of the Central Ohio Pro chapter, likes connections, advocacy, training and increasing the visibility of the Code of Ethics. He dislikes internal cynicism although he said the board’s tendency toward infighting doesn’t bother him. He wants the focus to be on what SPJ can do for reporters and outlets. He wants to bring in younger people and connect with people who aren’t members. He would support advocacy along the lines of media literacy, understanding the difference between real news and fake news and rebuilding trust in the media.

Sal Morales, a Florida-based broadcast news reporter who has been involved with NAHJ, likes the Code of Ethics because it means something and likes that SPJ welcomes freelancers. He wants more events and networking. He would like to see a more cohesive strategy and a greater focus on journalists in transition. He also wants to see more diversity and more outreach as well as networking. He likes that SPJ and NAHJ partnered.

Ginny Frizzi, a Pittsburgh SPJ leader, likes SPJ’s advocacy and the legal defense fund. She’s not pleased with the infighting of the past few years or the staff turnover. She wants SPJ to start promoting itself better and to demonstrate it has a strong communications plan in place. She says partnerships with NAHJ and RTDNA are
important in terms of both prestige and revenue. She’d like to see SPJ consider partnerships with smaller groups like environmental journalists, and do more advocacy for the First Amendment and for ethics.

Dan Mika, a reporter for the Business Journal in Colorado, joined SPJ a few years ago. He likes connecting with other journalists. Going forward, he’d like SPJ to consider an accelerator that looks at how to fund journalism, especially for news deserts. He says there is a crisis of trust and a financial crisis in journalism and he’d like to see SPJ partner with business schools for this accelerator. He wants to tap into the new, exciting and beneficial aspects of startups and show that media is a public good. He wants to do more outreach about media literacy, especially teaching people, both students and members of the public, how to identify fake sources of information. He also wants SPJ to explore how to improve working conditions for journalists, i.e. pushing back against content mills or underpaid young journalists. He wants to advocate for pay raises.

Jennifer Karchmer, an SPJ member since 2009 who belongs to the Western Washington Pro chapter, likes that it exists and offers support. She says the website has hidden resources that need to be better organized. She doesn’t see any big names in the organization and would like to, someone with the star power of Peter Jennings, Christine Amanapour or Katie Couric. She says, “the public needs to know we exist.” She said the organization should be about and for journalism, not necessarily journalists. She wants more outreach to students and would like to see a partnership with the Student Press Law Center in Washington, D.C. and more focus on safety for journalists. She wants to educate the public about what journalists do and would like to see a higher quality Quill in print and online.

Dave Cuillier, past president of SPJ, says both his like and dislike about SPJ is that it is the most broad-based journalism organization in the country. That’s a conundrum, he says. If SPJ is a membership organization, it should focus on chapters. But membership organizations aren’t growing, he says. Another option is to shift gears and reinvent ourselves and fill lanes that need to be filled like advocacy and public education. One big idea is to relocate to Washington, D.C., and to shift resources to lobbyism and advocacy, to take that money from membership support unless the organization can bring in additional revenue. He also wants to abandon the delegate system as it’s an archaic system of government.

Jonathan Make, a past president of the D.C. Pro chapter, says Cuillier offers a “cogent argument” as long as SPJ keeps a “welcoming vibe” at the national level. He suggests
that SPJ allow presidents to serve multiple terms as it would provide the organization more consistency.

Bob Becker, the D.C.-based chair of the Bylaws Committee, says SPJ’s advocacy for freedom of information and public access to courts is very important. He doesn’t like that the organization is still focused on 1990s-style journalism, focused on print and broadcast media. He says SPJ has failed to attract people in the new areas of journalism, where selling information and not advertising is what’s important. Geography doesn’t matter anymore, he says. He says SPJ should let the chapter structure stay in place but remodel itself along the lines of what people do, to keep members more engaged and ready to pay dues. SPJ should focus on skills, he says, and look to help journalists involved in smaller organizations, say maybe we can fill your needs.

Tim Gruver, a journalist in Salem, Oregon, asks how many SPJ members look like America. He wants SPJ to focus on unionization, fair pay, inequality and poverty. He says he was horrified that PSJ embrace Fox and doesn’t speak truth to power. He wants SPJ to partner with organizations like the ACLU and the NAACP, to partner with journalists of color, LGBTQ journalists, poor journalists, to go into universities. He also says, “SPJ should not be worried about infighting if they’re fighting for the right things.” He says SPJ should give journalists more value online, such as databases and Slack workspaces.

Suzanne McBride, who chairs the communication department at Columbia College Chicago, is a 35-year SPJ member who joined in college. She sees a total lack of diversity and inclusion. She wants more partnerships with NABJ, NAHJ, NAJA. She says literacy is a crowded space with a lot of organizations focusing on it.

Jennifer Ellis, the SPJ Arkansas chapter president, likes that SPJ is about improving and protecting journalism and the First Amendment. She is for the organization’s name change from Society of Professional Journalists to Society for Professional Journalism because journalism is an “important thing.” She doesn’t like SPJ’s lack of communication. She says she loves the networking she gets with SPJ but that it’s not the reason she’s a member. She is a member because she can associate with people of “like mind and passion.” She says the national chapter hasn’t reached out to the Arkansas chapter for three years, no one has offered help. She says her chapter is starting a mentorship program. She said SPJ needs to focus on its members, share great reporting. Its priorities needs to be ethics, the First Amendment and diversity. She never hears the legal defense fund stories. She’d love SPJ to partner with the Student Press Law Center, NABJ and more than just journalism organizations. She wants SPJ
to tell people how journalists do their jobs as they stress the importance of freedom of information and ethics. Focusing on trust in media and working with groups that stress the importance of that is key.

Patti Newberry, SPJ president, says she would love to see SPJ go all in on advocacy but also prioritize the membership model.

Haisten Willis adds that he sees a big need for defending journalism and freedom of information. He says if SPJ focused on advocacy and did it well, we'd increase membership. He said he doesn't think SPJ needs to move to D.C. but maybe it could have a staff member based in D.C. We may have to sacrifice some things and do less to do one thing well.

Hazel Becker says SPJ needs to reach out to journalists in need, create a community and pull together.

On Oct. 29, the student members offered the following:

Emily Waldenberg, the president of the University of Maryland SPJ chapter, likes the networking aspects of SPJ and that it brings students together. She says there is a huge gap at EIJ between students and pros. She suggests using social media to get students more involved. The Code of Ethics is really great, she says. It's a "building block" for student journalists. She suggests the idea of an SPJ campus ambassador, someone who might get $20 a month to be support SPJ on campus. She says late September or early October would be best for annual conventions because classes are just starting in September.

Brianne Hendricks, a graduating senior at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, says finding ways to engage students is hard. She doesn't like it when popular panels are full at convention. At EIJ, she'd like to see more sessions on technology: podcasts on a dime, Instagram stories. She says having a student mixer at EIJ would also be great. And a mixer for students and young pros. She'd like to see a one-stop shop for young journalists, a place to get help and motivation. Remote webinars would be good, too, she says. She'd like to see advocacy for local papers, what they're doing, why they matter. Highlighting local journalism would be excellent. A student takeover of social media would be really cool, too.

Joseph Maronski, a student in North Carolina, wants more resume workshops and a young professionals’ panel at EIJ, just to hear from young pros who are doing daily
journalism. He also suggests a “speed dating” type panel for young journalists, where they could circle around pros in a big room and meet as many as possible in a short amount of time. He also says late September and early October is best for a convention. He wants SPJ to focus on advocacy to get students involved. He likes the idea of promoting an SPJ LinkedIn page, getting pros to join that space and create a community. Having an ambassador or representative on campus would help put a face to SPJ. He says there are so many clubs on campus, you need to make yours stand out. “If they don’t learn about it on campus, they may not join ever,” he says.

Vaughn Golden, president of the Ithaca College SPJ chapter in New York, says there is a gap between student and pro members. He says he doesn’t hear from his regional coordinator. He says conferences are what keeps his chapter going because board members get to attend. He likes critique sessions and job opportunities at conventions as well as hearing what SPJ is up to, such as when he learned about the Casper Project. Community building is important, he says. Trying to get students to show up for programs is tough, but webinars and Facebook groups make it easier to get involved and connected. He also values advocacy, especially for local journalism. His big idea is to have a directory on the website so people can interact with students, in real life or online. A database would be great. He wants to hear from journalists of color, especially young professionals. How about a sponsor a student program to help students with their dues?

Peggy Sue Wood is in the Los Angeles area and likes SPJ because it has a lot of resources to teach journalists about good and ethical. Local meetings can be difficult to get to, she says. SPJ needs better advertising, she says. It also needs a better way to welcome new members. She thinks of SPJ as a “great resource” not really a networking opportunity. She wants a more interactive newsletter. The current one is dry with a lot of links, she says. She wants to know where local meetups are happening, what’s up in her local area. Webinars would be helpful as would a more easily navigable website. She likes the discounts for rental cars and AP stylebooks but says they are not promoted well. Her big idea is more merchandise, such as sweatshirts and tumbler cups for bottles so your hands don’t get hot or cold.

Brianne Hendrickson says she’d love to see coffee mugs with journalism quotes on them so you could collect several. Free press T-shirts, too. Wants SPJ to get involved with high school students.

Peggy Sue Wood says free membership for high school students would be a draw.
Vaughn Golden says his college chapter puts on programming for high school students.

Joseph Maronski says a student advisory panel would be great.

On Nov. 6, the final focus group offered the following:

Annie Culver, president of the East Tennessee State SPJ chapter, wants national to help with local websites, chapter ideas, partnerships. Perhaps the national website could link to local websites. She says the national website is confusing. She wants SPJ to focus on advocacy and continue its national conferences. She wants a big push for diversity. She wants personalized phone calls for members, such as when they are up for renewal.

Linda Delmonico Prussen, a New York-based columnist, likes SPJ’s educational component, including Quill magazine, the actual hard copy. She would love to see more help for freelancers, such as a big freelance marketplace. She wants to see SPJ partner with the American Society for Journalists and Authors.

Theola DeBose, a former reporter for The Washington Post, was a speaker at EIJ19 in San Antonio and is based in D.C. She is focused on helping journalists transition out of the industry and would like to see SPJ help along those lines. She would like to see SPJ put out an advocacy calendar with key dates like when the printing press was invented or H.L. Mencken’s birthday. She says seeing and feeling that would make people more clearly value SPJ’s advocacy efforts. She says SPJ could work with people outside the industry to help journalists build a broader range of experience and help them with the business side of journalism so they know how much to charge for certain things. She liked the partnership with NAHJ and says more partnerships are better. Training is key, she says.

Lourdes Menstre is a journalist in Arizona. She just joined SPJ in 2017. She’d like to see more help with entrepreneurship and mentorships from others who have been successful. She’d like to see internship opportunities. She’d like to hold people accountable for fake news. She suggests working with universities for networking and internships. She values the Code of Ethics and would be open to other partnerships. She likes the Google partnership and wants to see Google hangouts used on a regular basis. She wants print journalists to be mindful of the environment and environmentally conscious.
Annie Culver wants a redo of the website and more workshops more often. She wants previous SPJ award winners to be available to speak around the country and she wants SPJ to facilitate that. She wants mentorship programs, searchable by keyword and specialties online. She wants a job board and an ability to crowdsource for mentors/mentees/training speakers. She wants SPJ to offer more digital opportunities to keep members active.

Theola DeBose wants to celebrate journalism, to show smiling faces of members, quick member profiles. That would give people hope, she says. “Small human moments can go a long way,” she says. It’s a small idea, but highlighting and celebrating journalism is important, she says.

Emailed comments from Elliot Spagat, SPJ San Diego Pro board member on Nov. 11

I believe local chapters are SPJ’s lifeblood. It distinguishes SPJ from groups like IRE that, in my opinion, have far more robust national conferences. Our chapters are just as — or even more — vibrant than other groups that have chapters, like NAHJ and AAJA. I assure you that many in San Diego, including me, joined for the local chapter. Yet, chapters get only $10 of our $85 annual fee, and even that is optional. Money talks. I urge a reevaluation of our spending to redirect money to local chapters. I appreciate the two $500 grants that the San Diego chapter has received for events but feel local chapters deserve more than they currently get. If I can be brutally honest, I have thought about proposing membership drives with member-only benefits but knowing that the local chapter will get only $10 – and maybe not even that – is a strong disincentive.

I also encourage SPJ to keep advocacy as a top priority through public statements and alliances with groups and constituencies that share our views. National issues are extremely important, as are attacks on journalists outside the United States. Back to local chapters, they should be deeply engaged in local issues. We have been in San Diego and it has produced results.

Finally – and this may be a little off topic – I would encourage SPJ to reassess its partnership with Facebook. I won’t list the well-known criticisms of Facebook, but it seems like a one-sided relationship. SPJ’s imprimatur enhances Facebook’s reputation, and Facebook gets a valuable opportunity to promote its products to journalists. I don’t understand what SPJ gets in return.