

SPJ Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

October 26, 1999 - Columbus, Ohio

Meeting Date: October 26, 2000

Meeting Place: The Adams Mark Hotel, Columbus, Ohio

Roll Call:

Board Members Present: (20)

Kyle Elyse Niederpruem

Ray Marcano

Al Cross

David Carlson

Irwin Gratz

Julie Asher

Marcia Biggs

Ginny Frizzi

Patrick McKeand

Dave Aeikens

Robert Leger

Todd Gillman (arrived after roll call)

Jay Evensen

Oren Campbell

Mark Scarp

Melanie Ave

Jim Parker

Charles Davis

Elizabeth Fraas

Michelle Swafford

Board Members Absent: (3)

Wendy S. Myers

Lisa Rollins

Kevin Koelling

Staff Members Present: (4)

James L. Gray, Julie F. Grimes, Catherine Davis, other staff members were present for portions of the meeting.

Guests Present (for all or portions of the meeting):

Numerous guests were present during the meeting

Approval of Minutes from Past Meetings

April 29, 2000:

Motion by David Carlson to approve the minutes from the April Board meeting with a commendation to Julie Grimes for complete, accurate minutes. Second by Patrick McKeand. Motion carried.

SPJ Legal Defense Fund Appeal

President Kyle Niederpruem explained that Steve Wilson was present to appeal a decision by the three-member selection committee (SPJ President, FOI Chair and LDF Chair) that reviews SPJ Legal Defense

Fund Grant requests. The committee had turned down Wilson and Jane Akre's \$1,000 LDF request. Wilson presented his appeal, and LDF Chairwoman Christine Tatum explained the review committee's reasoning for its decision.

Wilson said that a jury had found in favor of his wife's case and that SPJ had awarded the couple an ethics award in 1998 for their efforts in this case. He said that this case involved journalistic ethics and the fact that reporters are asked to put their employer's issues ahead of their reporting. He referred the group to an online version of the lawsuit: www.foxbghsuit.com

Tatum, distributed the LDF guidelines adopted by the SPJ Board in October 1997 and said that this case should not be funded by the Legal Defense Fund. She said there were many other cases that had clear First Amendment claims and that was not the case in this situation. The fund is set up to finance First Amendment issues, said Tatum. She also explained difficulties and time issues involved in asking volunteers to do extensive research to determine the validity of employment issues.

Wilson and Tatum each discussed similarities and differences between this case and a case in Alaska where the committee chose to award funds.

Board members discussed the case including typical amounts given out in the past and issues around employment cases that also involved First Amendment issues. Charles Davis pointed out that in modern litigation, it is impossible to draw clear lines in cases. It may be time to revisit the guidelines for distributing legal defense funds, said Davis. Al Cross said that sometimes cases gain our sympathies, but the funds are set up now for particular uses and that must be kept in mind. Jim Parker agreed saying that the current question was whether the committee applied the guidelines correctly, not whether the policy should be changed. Marcia Biggs expressed concern about getting caught up in technicalities and missing the point that these reporters were being denied the right to tell the truth. She said SPJ should stand behind courageous journalists who stand up for what's right. Melanie Ave agreed saying issues should be handled on a case-by-case basis without concern for setting precedent. Davis returned to the idea that SPJ should consider a policy discussion in the future about the use of the funds. Jim Parker expressed concern about whether there is a free speech issue every time a reporter or editor kills a story.

Board members briefly discussed a past appeal in 1996 involving a situation in Saipain. It also involved a reporter who lost his job. The vote was a split one, and the reporter received a \$1,000 grant.

Tatum suggested that if the board wanted to support the two individuals, there were other ways to do it besides using LDF money. The board could propose or adopt a resolution supporting the two, said Tatum.

Ray Marcano asked that the question be called. Second by Ginny Frizzi. The board voted to call the question.

President Kyle Niederpruem suggested the issue be addressed in two parts: 1) whether to overturn the decision and 2) if overturned, the amount of money to be awarded.

Motion by Melanie Ave to overturn the action of the LDF review committee and grant assistance to the two reporters. Second by Oren Campbell. Niederpruem clarified that a "Yes" vote would overturn the committee's decision. A roll call vote followed. The results: Opposed: 10; In Favor: 7. The motion was defeated and the appeal denied.

Individual voting record:

Kyle Niederpruem: Did not vote (President only votes in case of tie.)

Ray Marcano: No

Al Cross: No

Wendy Myers: Absent

David Carlson: No

Irwin Gratz: No

Julie Asher: Yes (Noted decision was on merits of case.)

Marcia Biggs: Yes
Ginny Frizzi: No (Noted this would be a slippery slope to other issues.)
Patrick McKeand: No
David Aeikens: No
Robert Leger: No
Todd Gillman: Absent
Jay Evensen: No
Oren Campbell: Yes
Mark Scarp: No
Lisa Rollins: Absent
Melanie Ave: Yes
Jim Parker: Abstained (Parker works for Fox broadcasting.)
Charles Davis: Yes
Elizabeth Fraas: Yes. (Noted that her concern is that employer would have libel concern; her decision was not based on this vote setting policy or precedent.)
Kevin Koelling: Absent
Michelle Swafford: Yes

Report of the Executive Director

Executive Director Jim Gray referred board members to the printed report in the board packet.

Membership. Gray explained that more than 200 members were now participating in the split payment/multiple year membership options and that corporate members would be aggressively pursued in the coming year.

Staffing Issues. Gray said the Director of Membership has resigned. That makes three membership directors in one year. He said he had five strong candidates and the position would be filled easily and soon. He is also restructuring the position to make it more manageable.

Gray introduced Ben Everson, SPJ's Web Fellow. Everson updated the board on the Web progress since he began work in August. Most of the time thus far has been spent bringing consistency to the current site. Enhancements include chapter site space, e-mail addresses for board members, the addition of a convention section and the Access to Prisons Project. He hopes to have a consultant working with him by the end of the calendar year. Future enhancements include E-commerce, online Quill, a members-only section, Jobs for Journalists online and a site redesign. Board members questioned the setback in timing for the site changes. Gray said it's only a couple of months behind and there have been challenges with the service provider.

Gray commended Communications and Marketing Director Sarah Shrode for getting SPJ releases out and getting the organization noticed in areas we haven't been in some time.

Secretary/Treasurer Al Cross said the two main financial obstacles facing SPJ are Quill advertising and membership. With a new membership director, Cross encouraged board members to contribute ideas about recruiting and retaining members. He said that with the new advertising agency, he hoped to see an increase in Quill revenue also.

The group took a 10-minute break and returned to rearrange the agenda since time was limited.

Proposed Policy on Inactive Chapters

Jim Gray referred board members to information in the board packet. Cross pointed out that the proposed policy was set up to deal with chapter funds when a disbanding or inactive chapter had not put a policy in place to deal with its funds.

Some board members were concerned that sending funds to the national organization would bypass the regional funds, which could also use the funds. This policy would be in effect only if a chapter did not make plans in advance. This policy addresses money left "upon the dissolution of a chapter." Jay Evensen pointed out that this is important because it reemphasizes the connection and importance of the national organization. Patrick McKeand suggested adding a section presenting possible options of fund usage before it is distributed to headquarters. Robert Leger suggested getting input from chapters during the regional conferences next year.

Motion by Irwin Gratz to refer this issue to the SPJ Executive Committee for further discussion at the January meeting. Second by Elizabeth Fraas. Motion carried.

Dues Freeze Continuation

Executive Director Jim Gray recommended the continuation of the dues freeze for at least one more year while headquarters institutes more aggressive recruitment campaigns.

Motion by Elizabeth Fraas to continue the current dues freeze. Second by Charles Davis. Motion carried.

Collegiate and Institutional Memberships

Executive Director Jim Gray explained that the complete proposal was available in the board packet. This issue was initially discussed at the Fall 1998 board meeting in Los Angeles. Gray explained that traditionally, institutional membership has been based on contributions and fund-raising rather than member benefits. This proposal actually adds benefits to the membership categories.

Motion by Charles Davis to accept the proposal with the addition of a fourth category of "schools, colleges, or departments of journalism or mass communication" under the collegiate institutional membership category. Second by David Carlson.

Board members stated that headquarters must be able to provide more information about who's getting what, where, when and how than they have in the past. With a new membership director, there was concern about national's ability to inform regions and chapters about what's going on with these programs. If a paper joined as an institutional member, who will notify the paper's members of potential benefits?

With the new category, the consensus of the board was that the fee should be \$250, but the board left the final decision up to the headquarters staff.

On a vote, the motion carried.

International Membership Proposal

Executive Director Jim Gray explained that this complete report was available in the board packet. Gray discussed his recent contact with international members including a visit by a delegation of Korean journalists. Gray and Kyle Niederpruem each commented on the well-thought-out proposal presented by International Journalism Committee Chairman John Hopkins. The proposal provides a thoughtful, cautious approach to international memberships, Gray said.

Motion by Robert Leger to accept the proposal. Second Dave Aeikens.

Julie Asher asked about the expectations of the local chapters mentioned in the proposal. Gray explained that there were no requirements for participation; headquarters is simply look for support.

Charles Davis said that the University of Missouri -- Columbia has a great deal of experience working with groups of foreign journalists, and SPJ must be careful with its involvement with State Department groups since these frequently involve propaganda. Other members agreed that SPJ should proceed cautiously.

On a vote, the motion carried.

Committee Reports

President Kyle Niederpruem pointed out that the following committees also had submitted committee reports:

ACEJMC: Steve Geimann

LDF: Christine Tatum

FOI: Ian Marquand

Membership: Jerry Masek

The reports are available in the board packet.

Motion by David Carlson to accept reports of committee chairs and commend them for their work. Second by Elizabeth Fraas. Motion carried.

Awards Discussion

Motion by David Carlson to adopt the proposed Sigma Delta Chi and Mark of Excellence contests rule change on Page 22 of the board packet. The new rule would be located under the section on "Entry Requirements." The rule would require contest entrants to include "The text of any correction or clarification made in connection with the entry." (This is different from the original proposal in the board packet.) Second by Irwin Gratz.

Elizabeth Fraas expressed concern about adding an unenforceable requirement to the contest. Ginny Frizzi pointed out that volunteer judges already have lots of material to deal with without additional auxiliary information.

President Kyle Niederpruem explained that an issue had come up with last year's contest when an organization sent a packet of information about a piece that it thought may have been entered in the SDX awards contest. The packet attempted to refute the material in the entry. Charles Davis said that complaints about pieces in general were becoming more common. Irwin Gratz suggested that the issue is developing a policy for how to handle these submissions. SPJ needs a policy on what to do with this material if it is received.

Jay Evensen said that he would support sending documentation of any corrections or clarifications but not other items such as letters to the editor. It is the job of editorial writers to express opinions, which often generate letters disagreeing with the editorial.

On a show of hands vote, there were 10 in favor of the rule changes, and seven opposed. There was one abstention by Al Cross.

Motion by Irwin Gratz to direct Awards and Honors Committee Chairman Guy Baehr to develop a policy to deal with outside submissions that challenge Sigma Delta Chi or Mark of Excellence awards contests entries. The proposal should go to the SPJ Executive Committee for discussion at the January meeting. Second by Patrick McKeand. Motion carried.

DIVERSITY COMMITTEE REPORT

Recommendation on domestic partner benefits

Diversity Committee Chair Sally Lehrman presented a proposed resolution encouraging the adoption of domestic partnership benefits for news industry employees. The National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association requested that SPJ support NLGJA's effort to win domestic partner benefits for lesbian and gay journalists. Lehrman's proposal was distributed at the meeting.

Motion by Al Cross that the board of directors adopt the statement presented by Lehrman. Second by Patrick McKeand.

Jim Parker expressed concern about mandating benefits companies must provide. Others agreed, saying SPJ is an association of journalists, not a union, and the group shouldn't be dealing with employment issues. Lehrman assured board members this wasn't a mandate but a recommendation. This brings equity to people with domestic partners. Right now the effect is they receive 30 percent less compensation based on benefits, said Lehrman. This has to do with encouraging a diverse workforce, which relates to diverse content.

Irwin Gratz said this really wasn't an issue for board action. It wasn't a policy issue, and maybe the convention delegates would be interested in taking it up.

The motion and second were withdrawn. Board members encouraged Lehrman to take the resolution to the SPJ Resolutions Committee to consider presenting to the convention delegates.

American Journalism Collaborative Request.

Diversity Chairwoman Sally Lehrman proposed a statement for adoption by the board of directors in support of the American Journalism Collaborative. The group is seeking SPJ's endorsement.

Motion by Irwin Gratz to approve the board's statement and submit this statement to the SPJ Resolutions Committee also to be presented to the convention delegates for a convention resolution. Second by Jim Parker. The motion carried unanimously.

Future Convention Bids

Region 3 Director Marcia Biggs presented a bid for the 2003 convention to be hosted by the SPJ chapter in Tampa, Fla. Biggs distributed Tampa information packets and said the Tampa Tribune has agreed to be a major sponsor. She mentioned potential scheduling issues and indicated that the convention would need to be at the end of October 2003. The board consensus was to accept the bid and get ready for at 2003 convention in Tampa.

Adjournment

President Kyle Niederpruem expressed her pleasure with working with the board members saying they made her very proud. The meeting was running over, and the board decided to table further discussion items until the Sunday meeting, Oct. 28. The meeting was adjourned.

Action List

SPJ HEADQUARTERS

- At the board's instruction, the headquarters staff will continue the current dues freeze.

- An international membership proposal was adopted. Headquarters will begin implementation.
- A collegiate and institutional membership proposal was adopted. Headquarters will begin implementation.

SPJ BOARD MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS

- Board members discussed a reconsideration of the LDF guidelines at some point in the future.
- Executive Committee will review the policy on inactive chapters