

SPJ Executive Committee Minutes

January 20, 2001 - Tampa, Fla.

Meeting Date: January 20, 2001

Meeting Place: The Tampa Tribune, Tampa, Fla.

Roll Call:

Executive Committee Members Present: 5

Ray Marcano, SPJ President

Al Cross, SPJ President-elect

Robert Leger, SPJ Secretary/Treasurer

David Carlson, VPCCA

Irwin Gratz, Region 1 Director

Executive Committee Members Absent: 2

Kyle Elyse Niederpruem, SPJ Immediate Past President

Todd Gillman, Region 8 Director

Staff Members Present: 2

James L. Gray, SPJ Executive Director

Julie F. Grimes, SPJ Director of Society Initiatives

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

Marcia Biggs

Mac McKerral

Call to Order

President Ray Marcano called the meeting to order at 9:13 a.m. Secretary/Treasurer Robert Leger called the roll.

SPJ Headquarters Update

Executive Director Jim Gray distributed his report at the meeting.

Membership

Gray noted the organization's falling membership numbers. The group discussed current membership efforts. The committee was particularly interested in retention efforts.

Ideas discussed by the group: a chapter-based recruitment competition; getting chapters involved in contacting members who haven't renewed; letting chapters know which members are receiving renewal notices each month; having a commercial company handle membership renewals; and getting more complete data on the non-renewing members.

Gray explained that headquarters has been working to improve the product members receive. He said that information is better and includes a consistent look, and that staff response has improved with training.

The committee instructed headquarters to develop a Member Retention Plan and provide copies to committee members by March 1. The plan should include all the steps to be followed by headquarters in the renewal process. It should be implemented right away.

Marcano will work with Gray and Membership Manager Lynn Nerz to organize and implement a national membership drive this spring that will involve having chapters contact former and potential SPJ members in their areas.

Al Cross mentioned that he would still like to see a congratulatory letter sent to all the people that show up in the People sections of Editor and Publisher and Broadcasting and Cable magazines. This would be a personalized letter from an SPJ officer. Cross asked to see a plan for getting that done. He said that it was important to improve the quantity and expand the makeup of SPJ's membership. The group decided this idea would be further developed in the future, including a draft of a letter to be sent.

Gray mentioned that he hoped to accelerate his plans to add an electronic membership to SPJ's current membership categories. He also pointed out that the organization should consider accelerating its plan for international memberships.

Region 3 Director Marsha Biggs, a guest at the meeting, discussed the demise of SPJ's Atlanta Pro Chapter and the willingness of the Atlanta Press Club to work with SPJ. She said SPJ should consider working with other press clubs and organizations. The group talked about getting some national officers to Atlanta to talk with SPJ members and other journalists in the area. Marcano suggested having each officer send personal letters to members in the area and setting a time to meet with interested members in April. Marcano will work with Gray to finalize these arrangements.

Financial Report

Gray distributed the financial statements for December along with a statement of financial position. He said the financial results for December were positive, a good sign since December is not usually a positive month. Overall, the revenue picture is not good at this time. Gray said he has instituted a 15 percent reduction in expenditures by each department. Other cost-cutting measures such as layoffs would be implemented only if absolutely necessary.

The committee discussed the statements and asked for more information on the following line items: non-employee travel and events-meals and entertainment. The committee also asked if there were items that could be suspended, such as employee travel and education, until there's a clearer picture of the finances. Gray will provide this information to the Executive Committee by Thursday, Jan. 25.

Marcano asked for projections on the organization's cash balance. The consensus was that if there are red flags, the organization should be prudent, but drastic cost-cutting measures should not be implemented if past years' revenue flows indicate that revenue will pick up as the fiscal year progresses.

Secretary/Treasurer Robert Leger asked why institutional membership revenue currently had a zero balance. Gray explained that all institutional members are billed at one time during the year.

Fund Raising

Gray explained that the capital campaign had hit a stall and was now moving into Phase 2. This involves a direct mail campaign to SPJ members using a letter under Honorary Chair Jane Pauley's name. This will also go to others in journalism or those interested in journalism causes. Gray reminded committee members that the goal was \$1 million. SPJ has raised \$750,000. Gray said he would like to see an additional \$400,000 raised to return the money borrowed from SPJ and SDX invested reserves.

On convention sponsorships, Gray explained that fund raising was going well. Workshop sponsorships have turned out to be more of a problem. The Louisiana workshop doesn't have a sponsor, and may result in a loss of revenue. The group discussed possible sponsors and suggested approaching the Louisiana Press Association and Louisiana Broadcasters Association. Members commented on the good quality of the program lineup but were concerned about publicizing these programs earlier in the future. Region 1 Director Irwin Gratz said he thinks there's a \$2,500 sponsorship from The Press Herald for workshop in

Portland, Maine, later this year.

Marcano instructed that in the future, workshop brochures and publicity materials should be in the hands of potential participants at least eight to nine weeks in advance of any conference or professional development program.

Web Site and MIS Plan

Gray explained that Web Fellow Ben Everson had worked with FACS to get the Diversity Sourcebook online. At this time, it's being hosted on the FACS Web site. SPJ Diversity Committee Chair Sally Lehrman is working on edits to the information at this time.

Gray explained that Everson had solicited proposals from consultants to manage the site redesign. David Carlson has been asked to review the final proposal selected by Everson.

Carlson explained that the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation board had formed a committee to look into the housing and development of SPJ and SDX databases. The current site host has the capability to house Microsoft Access databases.

Carlson discussed the need for an overall Management Information Systems plan for the organizations. The plan would incorporate all computerized functions and would include guidelines for future development. It would outline where the organization is and where it needs to be, including plans for managing and accessing all the information members, chapters and staff would need.

The committee instructed Gray to have staff develop that plan and distribute it to the Executive Committee by fax by Friday, March 9.

The group took a 10-minute break.

Old Business

Policy on Inactive Chapters

Motion by Irwin Gratz to approve language changes to the policy and recommend it to the full board for a decision in April about whether to pursue a national bylaws change. Second by Al Cross. Motion carried unanimously.

Policy as recommended to the full board

Upon the dissolution of a chapter, a written report by the president of that chapter, with its treasurer concurring, shall be filed with national headquarters. This report should include a complete listing of the chapter's assets, including all funds on deposit in banks, savings institutions or investment firms, and a plan for fund disbursement for SPJ purposes subject to the approval of the SPJ national president and executive director.

Internal Revenue Service regulations prohibit the distribution of exempt organization funds to individuals. In the absence of a legal distribution plan, arrangements shall be made to transfer all liquid assets to national headquarters. Headquarters, in turn, shall hold these assets in trust for one year for the benefit of any chapter that may organize or reorganize in that geographic area. If, at the end of one year, the chapter is not reactivated and no new chapter is organized, title to all such assets of the chapter shall vest in the national organization.

Libel insurance and Riders for SPJ chapters

At its October meeting, the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation asked Executive Director Jim Gray to research possibilities for adding chapters to SPJ's libel insurance policy. Gray reported that this was not feasible, and for it to happen, chapters would be forced to give up their autonomy. Gray pointed out that any pages, including chapter pages, on SPJ's Web site would be covered. Gray said he could investigate an affinity program for chapters to purchase their own libel insurance.

SPJ Ethics Committee Report and Recommendations

SPJ's Ethics Committee submitted a report at the concluding board meeting of the Columbus Convention. The report was deferred to the Executive Committee for review and action. The report was included in the board packets.

Sponsorship Issues

Motion by Al Cross to have the SPJ Ethics Committee review the organization's current sponsorship policy and make a report to the spring board meeting. Second by David Carlson. Motion carried unanimously.

Ethics Award Nomination

Motion by Robert Leger to accept the Ethics Committee's nomination and present an Ethics in Journalism award to Otis Chandler and the newsroom staff of The Los Angeles Times for publicly, and successfully, challenging the deal that Times executives had made with the Staples Center to share advertising revenue. Second by David Carlson. Motion carried unanimously.

Ethics Week

The Executive Committee reviewed the Ethics Committee's idea of a national Ethics Week. The committee endorsed the idea and would like to hear more details about it. The Ethics Committee should present a detailed proposal, if possible, for the full board meeting in April.

SPJ National Convention Report

SPJ President-elect Al Cross reported that fund raising for the convention was on track with about \$95,000 of the \$115,000 goal secured. Keynote speaking invitations have been issued, and the Opening Night Reception will probably be at the Experience Music Project.

Ray Marcano encouraged the convention committee to have fun and think outside of the box. He suggested an SPJ Karaoke contest to attract students; the winner would receive a one-year complimentary membership.

Cross discussed a potential Infomart sponsorship by the Phillip Morris Company. Cross expressed his concerns and concerns of the Seattle chapter. Cross said his concerns center around the fact that the Infomart sponsorship helps underwrite the convention as a whole rather than a specific event.

SPJ's existing policy should not remove the discretion to choose. The group discussed allowing Phillip Morris to buy Infomart booth space rather than sponsor the Infomart exhibit hall.

Committee members discussed the original purpose of Infomart to provide an outlet for non-media companies to participate in SPJ's convention. There was a discussion about not being discriminatory toward any company.

The committee decided to contact the Seattle planning committee for more input and agreed to support the final decision. Seattle Planning Committee Chairman George Erb participated in a conference call. Erb said he was speaking on behalf of himself and not the committee and that he had no reservations about

renting booth space to Phillip Morris but was concerned about allowing the company to sponsor Infomart. Erb commented that controversy lingers in the tobacco industry because they were once active in hiding information from the media. Erb explained that he would start a discussion with the Seattle planning committee and would report back to the Executive Committee.

Executive Committee members explained that they were aware this would be a controversial sponsorship but considered it a discriminatory practice to not let certain companies sponsor Infomart and yet allow them to purchase space in the trade show.

Robert Leger pointed out that SPJ and media organizations often find themselves supporting in court and in editorials and columns, organizations whose activities we don't agree with, but we are supporting the First Amendment and freedom of speech.

Cross will send a summary of the Executive Committee's discussion to Erb, which he will convey to his planning committee. Erb will report back to the Executive Committee by Friday, Jan. 26. The Executive Committee will schedule a conference call to make a decision on the matter.

SPJ National Convention Proceeds Sharing

Secretary/Treasurer Robert Leger introduced an idea that was briefly discussed during the October board meeting. He provided a one-page handout listing past convention proceeds distribution. Leger proposed increasing the chapter incentive from 10 to 15 percent of net convention proceeds. Leger explained that this would have a minimal impact on the national organization's budget, and chapters would see a 50 percent greater contribution to their treasuries.

The group discussed local involvement in the convention-planning process. They briefly examined the idea of a tiered system of proceeds sharing. This would be developed and would include an outline of responsibilities related to amounts of proceeds received.

Al Cross explained that in planning a convention, the organization currently operates basically by consensus. The local chapter, headquarters and the national president-elect is involved, and there is no mechanism in place to determine whose decision is final.

Motion by Robert Leger to increase the national convention chapter incentive from 10 percent to 15 percent of net proceeds (gross surplus). Second by Irwin Gratz. Motion carried unanimously.

Leger pointed out that while some plans were in place for national convention participation, there were no written guidelines for chapters or regions that participate in the organization of SPJ national workshops. All profit-sharing arrangements have been on a case-by-case basis. The committee instructed Executive Director Jim Gray to develop a set of proposed guidelines for presentation to the Executive Committee at its July 2001 meeting.

Strategic Planning Update

Committee members reviewed a list of membership committees created as a result of the strategic planning process. The committee list, contact information and recent correspondence were in the board packets. Secretary/Treasurer Robert Leger, who is overseeing the implementation of the strategic planning committees work, said he hopes to see some of these committees make reports to the full board at its April meeting. Other reports will come later.

New Business

Third Edition of Doing Ethics in Journalism

Executive Director Jim Gray told the committee that a textbook publishing company had contacted him about whether SPJ was interested in revising the third edition of *Doing Ethics in Journalism* and excising Chapter 12 or at least the particular case study that was incorrect. Gray said he would be talking with Baker and Hostetler, SPJ's legal counsel, about whether this was a good idea and about whether SPJ could get the copyright back from the current publisher, Allyn and Bacon. Gray said the authors were interested in revising the book if possible.

SPJ Workshop Schedule

The group briefly discussed SPJ's national workshop schedule for the remainder of the fiscal year. Three workshops are firmly scheduled for Indianapolis, Portland, Maine, and New Orleans. Two others are being discussed: a Taishoff broadcasting workshop in Atlanta and an online/technology workshop on the West Coast in late summer.

Officer Representation at Regional Conferences

The group discussed officer representation at the spring regional conference. The following assignments were made:

- March 2-3, SPJ Region 7 Conference, Wichita, Kan., Robert Leger
- March 16-17, SPJ Region 8/12 Conf. & SPJ Workshop, New Orleans, La., Ray Marcano
- March 30-31, SPJ Region 1 Conference, Boston, Robert Leger
- March 30-31, SPJ Region 4 Conference, Pittsburgh, Jim Gray will represent the officers
- March 30-31, SPJ Region 5 Conf. & SPJ Workshop, Indianapolis, Kyle Niederpruem
- March 30-31, SPJ Region 10 Conference, Tri-Cities, Wash., Al Cross
- March 30-April 1, SPJ Region 2 Conference, Ocean City, Md., Ray Marcano
- March 30-April 1, SPJ Region 11 Conference, Anaheim, Calif., David Carlson
- April 6-7, SPJ Region 3 Conference, Orlando, Fla., David Carlson
- April 6-7, SPJ Region 9 Conference, Logan, Utah, Al Cross
- April 20-21, SPJ Region 6 Conference, Minneapolis, Minn., Kyle Niederpruem (tentative)

President Ray Marcano briefly discussed the timing of the April board meeting. The meeting is set for April 28 in San Diego, Calif. The Foundation board will meet from 8-11:30 a.m. The Foundation and SPJ boards will meet jointly from 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. The SPJ board will meet from 1-7 p.m.

While discussing upcoming meetings, the group examined a draft of a master planning calendar being developed by SPJ Headquarters.

President's Report

President Ray Marcano did not submit a written report, but addressed the following issues.

SPJ's Washington, D.C., Presence

Marcano distributed a memo from Baker and Hostetler, SPJ's legal counsel, regarding SPJ's presence in the nation's capital. Marcano said he was still enthusiastic about developing a greater presence there, but the reality was that it probably couldn't happen this year, and the cost might make it prohibitive for any time in the near future. He explained that if SPJ wanted to expand into D.C., the initial focus should be very, very narrow, focusing for instance on a single subject like privacy issues. Baker and Hostetler will be providing cost estimates for varying degrees of involvement, from simply increasing the current retainer so that the law office could be more active in a particular area, to the hiring of a fulltime legislative aide.

The group briefly discussed issues related to lobbying efforts by SPJ. Executive Director Jim Gray said that SPJ would be required to disclose what portion of a member's dues goes toward lobbying. The group

asked Gray to determine whether Baker and Hostetler was registered to lobby on SPJ's behalf.

The group consensus was the funding might be available in the future, so we should definitely move forward with the development of a proposal. They discussed the need for someone on staff whose job it was to interact with the media and to address SPJ's issues with them, someone who would make occasional trips to visit media outlets in D.C. and establish SPJ and its issues with these groups.

SPJ Training Center Report

The Executive Committee discussed the initial report of the Training Center Committee chaired by Charles Davis. The committee's report was not included in the board packets but was distributed to the Executive Committee by e-mail, and copies were available at the meeting.

The initial report makes no recommendation, but presents the research by the committee to determine what training programs are currently available to journalists. President Ray Marcano said that Davis felt there was a need for training for beginning journalists and small market journalists. But, those people and outlets can't or won't afford it. So, SPJ would need significant outside funding to be successful in that area. The group also discussed whether training programs should take place at a designated location such as SPJ Headquarters or whether SPJ should take its training programs to specific newsrooms around the country.

The group suggested adding this discussion to the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation board meeting agenda to talk further about potential funding for a training program. It may make more sense for the Foundation to be involved in training programs than for SPJ to take that lead. It would involve one or more staff members for the Foundation. A discussion in April could lead to a proposal for the Foundation board to consider in October.

Marcano will instruct the Training Center Committee to focus its ideas on career-entry development and training programs. They should focus on using the Headquarters space and also examine having SPJ or the Foundation send trainers into media outlets. A more detailed report should be available for the joint board meeting in April.

Al Cross suggested positioning SPJ as a clearinghouse for training. Organizations would come to SPJ when they were seeking training; SPJ could provide that training or direct them to other organizations that did.

The committee discussed the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation's purpose and mission as a supporting Foundation of SPJ. The Foundation is not prohibited from underwriting SPJ programs and projects. The committee briefly discussed the Foundation's plans to review and possibly amend its bylaws. Gray will have Baker and Hostetler review the Foundation's purpose and relationship to SPJ, and Gray will schedule a conference call with the Executive Committee to further discuss the issue.

Possible San Juan Chapter

Marcano said he met with 20 students (16 from Puerto Rico) who were interested in SPJ and in starting a chapter in Puerto Rico. The contact is Mike McQueen at Florida International University. The students also are interested in volunteering at the Region 3 Conference in Orlando, Fla., this spring. There are details to be worked out about chapter status and which region the chapter would be in, but Marcano is optimistic about organizing a chapter there in the future.

New Business

Publications Committee

President-elect Al Cross reported that a Publications Committee has been reestablished. The committee

acts as an informal editorial board for Quill magazine and will review any and all of SPJ's printed and electronic material. Committee members are from the Indianapolis area and are Jim Parham, Kathy Johnston, Bob Schulman, and Bill Bridges. looking for someone from Chicago.

FOI Activities

Vice President of Campus Chapter Affairs David Carlson suggested that SPJ undertake a national FOI effort where, on one day, SPJ representatives would go into all 50 states and request the same records and then report on the national results. The idea needs to be further developed, and a single record request needs to be decided on -- a record that would make an interesting local story. This activity would provide SPJ national exposure and would provide news stories in every media outlet across the country. Committee members discussed whether this should take place at the local or the state level.

Motion by David Carlson that the Executive Committee ask the SPJ FOI Committee to explore this issue and offer a detailed proposal by the Spring board meeting for a 50-state, single-day FOI audit to be conducted at a future date. Second by Irwin Gratz. The motion carried.

Several national project ideas were discussed during the Executive Committee meeting. At the April board meeting, the committee plans to review all the proposal and begin developing timelines for implementation. It is important to be active and visible, but we must be careful not to overextend ourselves.

April Meeting Agenda Items

Several items were noted throughout the meeting as projects needing additional discussion at the April board meeting. In addition, David Carlson asked that PressNotes be added to the April agenda. The board needs to discuss the continuation of PressNotes at a university level through the Ward Neff internship.

Chapter Grant Requests

The Executive Committee briefly discussed the Society's chapter grant program. The grant selection committee -- Ray Marcano, Al Cross and Jim Gray -- approved the following two grants: \$500 to the Mid-Florida Pro Chapter and \$415 to the Lincoln Collegiate Chapter. The initial grants were approved during a conference call in December. These grants had been held over as additional information was collected about the chapters' programs.

Executive Session: Personnel Issue

Motion by Al Cross to adjourn to an executive session to discuss a personnel matter or matters. Second by Robert Leger. The motion carried, and the group adjourned into executive session at 2:23 p.m.

Motion by Irwin Gratz to return from closed session. Second by David Carlson. The motion carried, and the group returned to open session at 3:30 p.m.

The committee took no action during executive session.

Adjournment

Irwin Gratz made a motion to adjourn. Second by Robert Leger. The motion carried, and the group adjourned at 3:32 p.m.

Action List

SPJ HEADQUARTERS

- Develop and implement a Membership Retention Plan. Distribute a copy of the plan to the Executive Committee by March 1. Plan should include details about each step of the renewal process. There should also be a way to inform local chapters and get them involved in the renewal process.
- Consider sending letters to those listed in the people sections of Editor & Publisher and Broadcasting and Cable magazines. These would be recruitment letters.
- Continue the development of the electronic membership idea.
- Develop a preliminary MIS plan. Include computerized function of headquarters and ideas for how all systems should work and what information should be available to headquarters and chapters. Include formats for databases and other electronic information. Distributed to Executive Committee by fax by Friday, March 9.
- All future workshop and conference publicity materials should be in people's hands at least eight weeks in advance of any program.
- Amend inactive chapter policy and bring to full board for a vote in April on whether to recommend a bylaws change.
- Notify Ethics Committee of Executive Committee's decision to present and ethics award. Notify ethics award recipients of the committee's decision.
- Executive Committee voted to increase chapter incentive payments from convention from 10 to 15 percent of net proceeds (gross surplus). (Does this need full board approval?)
- Executive Director should formulate convention guidelines for discussion at the Executive Committee meeting in July.
- Executive Director -- continue research into feasibility of revising Doing Ethics in Journalism.
- Executive Director should contact Baker and Hostetler concerning the relationship between SPJ and the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation.
- Add to the April board meeting agenda a further discussion based on the report of the Training Center Committee.

SPJ BOARD MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS

- Ray Marcano will be talking soon with Membership Manager Lynn Nerz and Executive Director Jim Gray about setting up a week of calls for membership recruitment.
- Ethics Committee will be asked to review the current sponsorship policy and make a report to the full board at its spring meeting.
- Ethics Committee will be asked to research its National Ethics Week idea and present more information to the full board at its spring meeting.
- Seattle Convention Planning Committee will discuss possible Phillip Morris sponsorship of Infomart and offer its opinions by Friday, Jan. 26. Al Cross will provide the committee with a summary of the Executive Committee's discussions. After the committee reports back to President Ray Marcano, Marcano will schedule a conference call with the Executive Committee to make a final decision.
- Ray Marcano has been in touch with students during a visit to Florida International University to discuss a possible chapter in Puerto Rico.
- The FOI Committee was instructed to explore the idea of a 50-state single day FOI audit to be conducted at a future date and to offer a detailed proposal to the board at its spring meeting.
- Training Center Committee should continue its work and submit another update for the April board meeting.