Membership Committee

Minutes

March 5, 2013

424-203-8075, Access Code: 519956#

Present: Christa Hillstrom, Chair; Jo Ellen, Brian, Shay, Andrew

Absent: Hanaa (family leave), Liz (family leave)

**1. Should we raise dues?**

Are our current fee structures still working for us? Do we need to create higher fee brackets for outlets with the biggest budgets?

*Not a lot of excitement about paying dues even at—or especially at—the higher end.*

*Important that current members pay dues, that we develop members so that they do move from associate to full members, and that we bring on newer members. If what we are providing is valuable enough, people will pay more. If it isn’t, they won’t join.*

**2. Should we charge for the annual meeting?**

 -This idea was brought up at the meeting, and is somewhat controversial. What would be the pros and cons of this?  Should we not charge members but advertise more widely to the media world in general for paid admission, or could we get away with charging a small fee to members?

*The cost of attending the meeting can’t be so high that it prevents anyone from coming, because the value of the meeting is that people are there, so we can’t drive people away.*

*Three possibilities outlined by Jo Ellen:*

*Flat rate for members (discounted, based on conference cost)*

*Tiered rate for members*

*Flat rate but scholarships available*

*Sense of membership committee was that scholarships would be best way. Folks could even add extra to provide scholarships for other organizations.*

*Would this affect organizations that send 3-4 people? Would we charge per organization or per person? Start by sending*

*Right now, about 50-60% of members attend; if we charged a fee, would we have less representation?*

*Maybe we start with a small amount, like $25. Just a token amount, that let’s us evaluate the price point.*

*We could just issue tickets, let people know what the price point is, and say, pay what you want, with a suggested donation. Would this turn off anyone?*

**2b. Any Downside to opening annual meeting to non members?**

*What if conservative media bloggers/outlets want to attend? We don’t have to let non-members into our discussions about the future of the Consortium, etc., but we would have to let them into the main meeting. There could be a lot to learn from folks who don’t align with our progressive mission.*

*If we do have non-members attend, then we could give them free dues for the year they attend the conference—i.e. their payment to attend would be their dues.*

*Beneficial to have presenters and panelists and other non-members participating—a lot to learn by having them there. This could be a strategy—have folks we might want to be part of the Consortium to be presenters, etc.*

**3. Recruit new members**

        -Can we come up with a strategy around this, and how do we start it?  Do we need to create outreach materials that are focused on the benefits membership can bring to potential organizations (eg, we could create an impact portfolio around collaborative efforts like May Day coverage)?  Where should we focus recruitment efforts, and how should the effort be divided?

        -Who are our dream members?  How can we get them? Are there any big outlets that we would really love to have, where we could offer them a year of free membership as a specially selected organization, nominated by their peers in the indy media world, but charge them a full fee the following year?  Would that make financial sense for us to do in the long term?

        -Should we expand our focus a bit to include spirituality magazines? They almost all have a mission of improving the world (engaging with the world, service, etc), but are usually not as overtly focused on hard news or political analysis as most of our members. Yet, there could be great interaction, esp around environmental and poverty issues. They also tend to be independent, nonprofit, and have business models very similar to the rest of us. I'd like the membership committee to discuss creating a category for these folks.

*Shay: I think we could expand out to spirituality and the environment. We may want to set a goal of adding a certain number of new members. We should have a pitch and a list of what we offer. Maybe those of us on the membership committee can test it out, and then put out the info to the full membership. Peer to peer will really sell the consortium, as much as anything.*

*Christa: It would be good to make it as easy as possible to have materials available to send people.*

*JGK: I can get those materials together and put them on a google doc so you can edit them. What I want to know if we can bring in spirituality outlets.*

*Christa: Spirituality is a big category. Some do write about politics, like Sojourners.*

*Andrew: The values are generally aligned. The content can be quite different. Nothing negative; but does it distract from our focus?*

*JGK: To change the subject, I have talked to opendemocracy.net and they are interested. I suggested bringing them on at an associate level, so we can see how much value they can get given they are overseas.*

*Agreement: Looking to recruit about 20 new members this year.*

***Next Steps:***

***1. Refining recruitment materials***

***2. Do peer-to-peer targeted recruiting***

***3. Send a message to members asking if they have recommendations.***

**Next meeting:**