

Special General Meeting
August 27, 2020

In Attendance: Terry Lavender, Ki-Youn Kim, Jay Whetter, Tim Lougheed, Nikki Berreth, Carolyn Brown, Veronique Morin, Burke Cullen, 2 attendees by phone.

Meeting called to order: 7:36 pm EDT

Welcome/Introduction (Terry, President)

- Please keep videos off during the session
- Questions can be posted in the chat
- Overview of the next 30 minutes

Reason for changes initiated in 2017 (Tim)

- *Prior to 2014, there were organizations that set up purely for political purposes. They were very nepotistic and didn't have any bylaws structure. They were basically a club calling themselves nonprofit. The Conservative government didn't like it so they imposed a federal rule that changed the system for all federal organizations. And the nice part about this was that they actually did it in a very user friendly way - by creating a bylaw builder on the Corporations Canada website. It helped you go through your bylaws & constitution and adapt it to the structure that they want.*
- *For example: Do Directors have an appointed term? Or are they an autocratic dictator in position for life? Nobody can get them out. Is there a mechanism for getting someone problematic removed from the board if they start doing things that are counterproductive or actually harmful to the organization?*
- *This all appears quite logical, but at the same time there was a parallel issue that came up, which had been simmering for quite a while, which was that the makeup of the organization had shifted quite dramatically over the course of about a decade from what it had been since its founding 1970. The overwhelming majority, more than 90% of the members, wouldn't qualify in a traditional definition as "journalists". They were communicators in a broader sense, but they didn't fit into our membership tiers. As well, there were terms within the language of the constitution that were defining positions and who could hold certain positions, specifically the presidency.*
- *Mostly, it excluded people that didn't fall into this category. There were a simmering of protests about it and when the constitution was up for discussion, this came to the fore as a number of people said this is the time to start making*

changes to exclusionary language. So we got a lawyer involved from a Kingston law firm that helped us with this and the term that we moved to is what's called "one tier membership" with no second tier.

- *An example of a multi-tier organization is the Society for Environmental Journalists. They make huge distinctions between who is a journalist who is not a journalist who is a student, and so on, where the privileges within the organization vary. There are discussion groups you cannot access unless you qualify as a journalist. There are positions you can't hold unless you are a journalist. And they make no apologies about this. This is built into the DNA of their organization.*
- *On the other hand, the ACS in Quebec was always set up for everyone. It was one tier membership, anybody could come. Basically, you had your hundred dollars, a heartbeat and you showed up, it was all good. The Australian science communicators were very much like this. And I remember the first time I realized that there were organizations that didn't have these distinctions was when the president of that organization said to me, we're an "open church". That's the language that he used. And, you know, that meant that a scientist or a student, or public relations person or a Government Communications Officer, anybody could hold any position within the organization could join. It was all one big happy family. We didn't have that.*
- *In 2016, we built in all kinds of safeguards that the constitution was, in fact, passed. Now what we're doing here today is the last piece of that puzzle.*
- *We are registered with corporations Canada, the federal government, under what are called articles of continuance. And this is a simple three page document. That looks deceptively straightforward, but actually is the sort of source code, if you like, of the entire organization as the government sees it. And that name was never changed. We changed the language and described it as a one tier membership, but we could not change the name at that time without a two thirds majority vote. In that document registered in Ottawa, we are still called the Canadian science writers organization as it was established in 1971.*
- *This is a coming of full circle for the changes that were introduced. And the further changes that are being put in there simply reflect the ongoing moves of the current board to keep cleaning up, dotting the i's and crossing the T's. There's no big mess here to clean up, we managed to address most all of the problems as far as I was concerned, that were identified back in 2014/2015. To us. But the nice part is that people now feel very comfortable in discussing this. We've, the process has gone from being mysterious to being fairly clear. And with this, it's one more sort of example to the members that the organization is defining its identity and becoming that open church that the Australians demonstrated for me years and years ago.*

Discussing the new/proposed changes to the constitution & bylaws

- Clearly defined Director terms
- Updated terminology (ex: cheques, mail)
- Aligning it with the changes to the Corporations Canada Act (getting rid of “ex-officio and defining voting guidelines.)

Notices

- 50th Anniversary announcement
 - *Before I turn the meeting, just three very quick announcements first, as some of you know, because you're on the committee This year marks the 50th anniversary of our organization, which began October 15 1971, a small group of science communicators approved to draft constitution establishing the CSW a special committee as I said to two members that at least two members are on the call today is planning how we will celebrate this milestone and so check the website in your inbox for more information in the next little while.*
- AGM Postponement
 - *Second, as you know, we had to postpone the AGM because of covid. The AGM will be scheduled for sometime in November, and we will be sending in detail shortly.*
- People's Choice Awards - nominations are open
 - We have just opened the People's Choice Awards for nominations. So go to sciencewriters.ca/peopleschoice

Question period & comments

- Question (Carolyn Brown): There is a clause in the constitution that covers misconduct? What is the reason behind adding that to the constitution?
 - *If there was even one member who was upset with the way everything was going, the change gives them a nuclear option where they could pull out a clause and say, “you are violating the terms of our constitution and I am empowered to invoke a vote” or something that would pull the rug out from under from under this person. We haven't had to invoke this ourselves before, but there are many examples of organizations that have. Including this in the constitution safeguards us against this in the future.*
 - *If there's any other questions since there's so few of us, feel free to unmute yourself and just speak out. Otherwise, I will close this meeting. Thank you everyone for attending and I hope you Enjoy the rest of the summer.*

Reminder that voting ends at midnight EDT (9pm PDT)

Meeting adjourned: 8:02 pm EDT (5:02 pm PDT)