

SATW Eastern Chapter Board Meeting
Minutes
October 27, 2016
The Sanderling Resort, Duck, North Carolina

In Attendance:

JoAnnGreco
Kim McKinnon
Jason Frye
Theresa Medoff
Aaron Tuell
Bob Jenkins

Topics discussed:

- Improvement of meeting award recognition
- Meeting hosts and sponsors
- Location specifics and host needs
- How to account for clips/demonstrate ROI to hosts
- Professional Development topics and resources
- “Floating” PD sessions
- Membership makeup
- Prospective members and meeting attendance, cocktail receptions or other get-togethers
- Visibility of the chapter/organization through press releases and social media
- Possible Social Media Committee for Eastern Chapter
- Volunteers: needs, how to get
- Sheridan Meeting: meeting planner, travel logistics, meeting website

Meetings:

Improvement of award ceremony.

Entry fees for awards (writing and photography) approximately cover the costs of awards distributed

Logistic issues with awards: finding judges, setting and sticking to deadlines (for entries, collection and distribution of entries, and judging), actual presentation of awards

Awards have been announced at final dinner, but this presents issues, namely attendance and attention. Since many associates and a good number of actives leave prior to final dinner and award presentation, the audience isn't what we, or the winners, would like. In the past, presentation of the winners has been something less than attention-grabbing and the audience grows restless. How do we improve this? By moving award announcements and prize distribution earlier in the meeting, like at the Business Meeting held on the first full morning.

Award winners should also be announced via social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram as appropriate) by the chapter

Hosts and Sponsors.

Discussed difficulties in securing meeting hosts and sponsors. With sponsors, there's no set min/max for sponsorship monies sought for each meeting; the number of sponsors can look deceiving because the host receives a number of "sponsorships" they then divvy up among their partners/shareholders.

In seeking sponsorships, the board discussed opening sponsor opportunities to entities beyond the typical destination/hotel/attraction sponsor and talked about opening it to products as well (Eagle Creek Luggage was one mentioned specifically) if they were a good fit for the organization/meeting.

On meeting location, Aaron Tuell summed up it up nicely when he said, "We want a location that gets the writers excited, which, in turn, brings more associates." This approach presents a win-win for the host and the chapter: the host has actives excited to go write and tell the story, the chapter's associates have a large number of actives to work with to tell their stories.

Meeting purpose was discussed: chapter meetings are not—and should not be treated like—a press trip, they're a business gathering, so networking and media marketplace are the first priorities. However, this presents a difficulty for hosts as they often see our meetings as a giant press trip and are therefore reluctant to accommodate associate members. While the host is correct—they have a gaggle of travel writers in their destination—and they want to satisfy their partners, they need to understand the associates are an equally valuable part of the organization, which is why the Eastern Chapter has instituted bundled pricing for associates, meaning their registration includes hotel and all core conference fees (in the case of the upcoming Sheridan meeting, it also includes pre- and post-tours as the host is providing these to us).

Demonstrating Value and ROI to hosts

The lack of clips in our clips book and the inability to consistently show a Return on Investment for past hosts has hindered efforts to secure future meeting hosts. The board agreed that we must institute some measures to improve this lest we find ourselves hostless for a future meeting.

Professional Development:

In light of the continual evolution of the travel journalism industry (which has spread beyond print and blogs to include longform and personal-essay style journalism, broadcast and online video, Instagram and social influence channels), the board agreed that future PD sessions need to address trends and leading edge elements of our industry, but also that we need to go back to basics to benefit both advanced users and those in the first stages of venturing into the digital realm. To that end, we discussed PD session ideas like Social Media 101, running co-currently with a Social Media 201/301 style session.

As we are the Society of American Travel Writers, the board discussed ideas on how to hold a Writing Improvement Clinic or Writing Tips PD session. These included bringing in outside experts (Journalism or creative writing professors, editors, and profes-

sional writing coaches) to give a general pointers session or getting more specific with writing improvement strategies; it also included a writing “workshop” of volunteer submitted stories to be critiqued by a session leader as an example of ways to improve elements of storytelling. Associated with this could be a session geared toward our associate members on crafting more dynamic pitches and press releases, following a similar format.

Aaron Tuell brought up a speaker specializing in “workflow ‘hacks’” and tips specifically for our associate members. Aaron heard this speaker at the North Carolina 365 Conference on Tourism and is looking into this as a potential topic or speaker.

Also discussed: a mixed associates/actives panel discussing topics ranging from working together (the good, bad, and ugly), expectations from one group to the other, successful press trips/pitch and story results/working relationships.

Other topics included: Writing for Digital Culture. Further exploration of Social Influencers. Blogging (again, basics or more advanced). How to Behave (or not) on Press Trips. JoAnn Greco specifically would like to see more melding of all editor members with active members.

“Floating” PD Sessions

The board discussed the idea of holding a “floating” PD session where one speaker would visit 2-3 destinations within the chapter to deliver a talk of benefit to both actives and associates. Though no ideas for topics or speakers were finalized, the board agreed that this format would be a good value add for members.

Further Value Add through PD

One final point on PD was discussed: recording and making available PD sessions for chapter members, possibly for the whole organization if other chapters were on board. One provision for this was the need for recording equipment, which could be solved with a \$500 (approximate) purchase of a good digital camera, tripod and memory card.

Membership

Demographics and New Members:

The board discussed the need to diversify the membership body of the Eastern Chapter to include more diverse voices and more diverse styles of travel journalism, thus reflecting the younger and evolving demographic of professionals working in the travel space. Along with this point, the board discussed the lack of high-level travel editors (examples include National Geographic Traveler, National Geographic, Vogue, major newspapers, Conde Nast, in-flights and even smaller niche publications like Backpacker magazine.) Methods for diversification included: inviting prospective members to attend chapter meetings, the proposed floating PD sessions, to lead PD sessions,

The question of why a prospective member should join was raised, and that’s a difficult question given that our membership lacks those valuable editorial connections (see above). A discussion on the value of a membership was raised.

One potential value add and membership driver was proposed: monthly “cocktail hours” held in different cities within the chapter’s region. Different from a PD session, these would be pure networking and allow actives and associates within the area to come together for a no-pressure hour or two where both segments of membership would be encouraged to bring a prospective member, with the hopes of demonstrating the community and value of an SATW membership. Cities were proposed—Boston, New York, Charlottesville or Richmond, Raleigh or Durham or Charlotte, Atlanta, Miami or another Fla. City—and tentative plans to begin this program in January were set. Cost to the chapter would be minimal—possible venue rental or incidental catering—though it would be possible to have a hotel, attraction, restaurant, et cetera sponsor the event and provide it gratis. Chapter membership chair, Theresa Medoff, was charged with reviewing membership locales to get a better sense of which destinations might best work.

Tying membership and meetings together, it was suggested that we add a clause to the RFP for future chapter meetings stating that we would invite a number of local/regional media to take part in the non-business side of the meeting; non-member attendance of marketplace was not discussed.

As a way to incentivize new members, it was proposed that the chapter invite 2-3 prospects to the chapter meeting (again, everything but the business meeting) and provide them with a “scholarship” or stipend to cover some or all of the costs of registering. Potential methods for identifying prospective guests — such as social media influencers — were discussed but not settled on.

Aaron Tuell brought up the membership directory. Was there a way that it could be more searchable, perhaps with an online component? That led to a brief discussion on whether a print version was still viable/necessary.

Chapter Visibility and the Authority of Our Travel Voice

As SATW is the Voice of Travel, the board decided that we need to BE the voice of travel and discussed reinstating the press releases the chapter used to do. We could use a series of releases—with quotes from our chapter president—to promote Eastern Chapter destinations and attractions, even writers and photographers. Topics included: Top Beaches on the East Coast according to SATW, Resorts/Cities/Restaurants SATW Members are Most Excited About, and the like. The board discussed sending out a survey to obtain these destinations/attractions/stats for said releases.

The board also moved to open a new chapter-only Instagram: TheVoiceOfTravel or some such. (Another suggestion was that the handle be more visually -based— something like Sense of Place). We will use this moving forward to re-post our members’ Instagram shots and put SATW Eastern Chapter at the digital forefront of the organization. Low cost options are available for automating some of this and developing the audience aggressively and Jason Frye is looking into that.

The board discussed instituting a Social Media committee to look into helping members get set up (and continue to use) platforms like Instagram and Twitter, and to boost the underwhelming social presence of SATW national as well as build the new TheVoiceOfTravel Instagram.

Volunteers

How do we get them?:

The chapter always needs volunteers—for chapter meetings (from dining captains to tour captains to those helping with organizing and running the meeting), the new social media program, the new cocktail get-together and others; and we need representation on national volunteer committees (like membership). But how do we get people to do it? There was no good answer, but it was agreed that board members would come to the table with ideas for increasing volunteer numbers soon. One suggestion: each board member should reach out to his/her contacts and try to bring in three volunteers.

Sheridan Meeting

Dates for the core meeting are June 22-25, later than usual for our chapter meeting, but necessary to ensure good weather in Sheridan.

The board members present voted unanimously to provide a \$200 subsidy to cover travel for the upcoming Sheridan meeting. This subsidy is extended to all members. Cost of the meeting will be \$400 per person plus air, the \$200 subsidy would essentially cover the cost of a flight from Denver or a connecting airport to Sheridan.

Also discussed on the Sheridan meeting was opening it to other chapters as needed or desired.

As Sheridan is unwilling to build us a meeting website, the board has engaged an outside company to build a template we can use for Sheridan, then reuse for future meetings. JoAnn Greco's husband, Ray Katz, has been in talks with Kim McKinnon about this and price (\$1,500) and deliverables were discussed, as well as timelines and the functions provided on the site. It seems that he will be able to meet all of our needs. (Post-meeting, Kim, SATW General Council, Jason Frye, and Ray Katz ironed out a contract.)