Improving Policy Council Meetings

Recommendations of the Organization and Bylaws Committee (Bob Eberlein, Brad Morrison, Roberta Spencer), October 11, 2012

During the 2012 Summer Policy Council Meeting the Organization and Bylaws Committee was charged with investigating ways in which the Policy Council could improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its meetings. The committee met on October 11 to discuss this, and would like to make the following recommendations:

* Monthly ½-hour conference calls
* Two part summer meeting
  + Procedural
    - Reports presented as one-slide summaries
    - Business conducted as it arises
  + Facilitated Opportunity Exploration and Problem Solving
* Winter meeting organized as needed
* Routine reports provided only for summer meeting

Details on these recommendations as well as the rationale behind them are included below. The intent of them taken together is to:

* Increase participation by Officers and PC Members
* Provide continuity and awareness of ongoing activities
* Allow participants to see the person behind the reports
* Engage the PC in more strategic discussion

There is nothing in our recommendations that changes the roles and responsibility of Officers, PC Members or Committees.

# Monthly Conference Call

Currently there are only two opportunities for synchronous discussion during the year, and many people attend only the summer meeting. There is no practical way for most to catch up with what is going on and, as a consequence, many are hearing discussions for the first time at the summer PC meeting. By having a short (½-hour) monthly conference call scheduled at a time that is reasonable for most Officers and Members, everyone will have many more chances to participate. If the call is recorded, those not able to join will also be able to listen to it afterward. This will provide continuity that is currently lacking.

The call should include current business: things that have come up for the Central Office, status reports from Officers and active committees and any news that seems useful to share. The calls can also be used for brainstorming, straw polls and the like at the discretion of the President (or President Elect as the year winds down). The call needs to start and finish promptly so that it can be dependably scheduled by all participants. The Office is looking into the most effective provider to support the call. We recommend that the calls start in November. Because we are nearing the transition to the next President, the current President and President Elect should jointly decide call scheduling and agenda to get us started.

# Two Part Summer Meeting

Our recommendation is to separate the summer meeting into two parts of approximately equal duration: first a formal procedural one, much like what we currently have, and second a problem solving session run with a facilitator (not necessarily the President). This is based on the belief that the procedural format is not well suited to some of the discussions the Policy Council engages in.

## Procedural

The procedural portion would be run largely as it currently is. The changes we recommend are to have each report briefly delivered and to not separate out business requiring votes from the reports.

### Reports presented as one-page summaries

VPs and others who now submit reports would continue to submit the written reports, and in addition they each would submit a one page PowerPoint slide which would be collated by the President into a presentation. Each report would be delivered in one to two minutes by the responsible person speaking to the slide. The written slide will make it easier for non-native English speakers to understand what is being said, and condense the main points of the report. Delivering the report will also let people get to know the people providing the reports a little better. While it is desirable for people to read reports ahead of time, this is not happening, and our current practice leaves people largely ignorant of Officer and committee activities.

To the extent possible the report slides should clearly indicate what commitments the Officer or committee made to the council at the last meeting, how they have been fulfilled, and what new commitments are being made.

### Business conducted as it arises

Rather than breaking out motions as a separate part of the agenda it is recommended that anything requiring a motion be taken up as it enters discussion. So, for example, conference related decisions would be made in sequence with the VP Meetings report. This will increase the time spent on reports, but should improve continuity and decrease overall time for both reporting and decisions.

## Facilitated Opportunity Exploration and Problem Solving

The meeting format we employ works well for formal decision making, but it is not effective for ideas and questions that are less completely formulated. To this end we recommend that roughly half of the summer meeting be devoted to a facilitated discussion around important issues that need development. There could be one or many topics discussed. There could be separate facilitators for each topic or a single facilitator for all. The President is responsible for selecting the topics and appointing the facilitator(s). Should discussion result in a desire to take action via a vote, the President would preside for the motion, second, formal discussion and vote.

# Winter meeting organized as needed

We do not have strong recommendations on the winter meeting except to say that it should be reformed after seeing how changes to the summer meeting and a monthly phone call work out. We would note that the electronic meeting held during the winter meets the requirements of a twice annual meeting and therefore the face-to-face portion of the winter meeting could be dispensed with altogether if the conference calls are working.

# Routine reports only provided for Summer meeting

We recommend, as was discussed during the summer meeting, that written reports be provided only once a year at the summer meeting. When an Officer or committee has news to share they should make a special report (such as this one), or provide a description during the monthly conference call. The delivery of reports twice annually results in too much repetition of content.