



Meeting of the Board of Directors

Friday 1st December 2017

Live, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Public Meeting Minutes - Final

Present

Ethan Zuckerman, Board Member
James Deane, Board Member
Marianne Diaz Hernandez, Board Member
Mohamed Nanabhay, Board Member, Chair
Qurratulain (Annie) Zaman, Board Member
Rebecca MacKinnon, Board Member

Absent

Laura Vidal, Board Member
Miguel Paz, Board Member
Sue Gardner, Board Member

Others Present

Georgia Popplewell, Managing Director
Ivan Sigal, Executive Director
Katherine Gatewood, Finance/Admin/Minutes

1. Welcome

Meeting called to order at 3:00pm by Mohamed Nanabhay, Chair, noting presence of a quorum.

2. Minutes of the last meeting: Review and approve September 2017 Board Meeting Minutes

Directors reviewed minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2017. Ethan Zuckerman motioned to approve minutes. James Deane seconded. Minutes unanimously approved.

3. Board Report Review

3.1 Summary

Ivan Sigal, Executive Director, briefed Directors on structure of the Q3 Board Report, noting use of simplified template, as well as a standardized metrics structure. Noted that SGV traffic has both a relationship to world events, and with 'attention' events, as an example of the complexity of the current media ecosystem. Discussion of whether to selectively pay to boost traffic on social media platforms.

Ethan Zuckerman asserted SGV is not metrics-driven. Ivan noting that recent Free Basics research received very little attention, but this was not indicative of impact, which came through elite awareness and quotations from mass media. This raises questions about how SGV should measure success. Agreed that while it is important to track metrics, this shouldn't necessarily be SGV's primary measure of success.

Marianne Diaz Hernandez agreed that quantity is not indicative of impact, seconding Zuckerman's reference to Free Basics and the feedback she's received regards SGV as doing groundbreaking work. However, Diaz also noted that many volunteers see social network followers as a sign of success, and that there isn't an easy answer. Zuckerman commented that to the extent that contributors are watching metrics, they're watching control metrics - not an indicator that SGV is being read.

Hernandez discussed feedback received about content SGV puts out, and an issue with lack of consistency. Hernandez referenced her own control over content as a contributor, but lack of control over what the team puts out, noting that this is a concern for other volunteers.

Zuckerman returned to the issue of metrics, stating that SGV should continue to monitor metrics, but should be focused more about the health and success of projects and the community, particularly given that traffic is increasingly beyond our control and less relevant than the community's work.

James Deane noted that contributors spend time and risk to generate content, leading to a concern if content isn't being widely read. Zuckerman responded that the SGV community has become a collection of writers, activists, mentors, etc., where the act of writing in public is what centers the community, adding that the lesson being taken from Free Basics work is that even if only one person reached is influential, this is success.

Nanabhay suggested holding additional discussion until Section 5: Strategy Discussion. Sigal gave brief overview of strategy development process, which was developed primarily by Sigal/Popplewell, with input from MacKinnon/core team, and survey of 200 people.

3.2 Board book highlights discussed

Rising Voices Update

Sigal discussed Rising Voices network building, and the potential to develop consultancy model of methods and practices with bottom-up community building.

NewsFrames Update

Sigal briefed directors on NewsFrames collaboration and use of Media Cloud, highlighting examples. Directors reviewed example post from NewsFrames site.

Annie Zaman raised the bias detector, which Sigal stated was not being used in analysis, lacks API, and isn't yet ready for use. Zuckerman agreed, noting the tool only speaks English, vs. Media Cloud's capacity to speak 22 languages.

Nanabhay questioned whether it was possible to monetize NewsFrames. Sigal responded that currently monetization isn't possible, and that we first need to prove that working with the data can be systematized, including integration with Media Cloud. Stated that there may be interest if SGV can integrate several tools, but this would require multiple rounds of development. Sigal also mentioned the potential to build out a meme analysis tool to open potential for collaboration/joint venture where this becomes the platform for analysis, especially if SGV can get large media brands on board.

Sigal briefed directors on new, more in-depth presentation of financials. Zuckerman noted cash in hand at end of Dec leaves SGV with 7 months burn. Sigal updated directors on potential new revenue, including invitation from MacArthur Foundation to apply for 3-year grant.

4. Strategy Review

Directors reviewed SGV strategy document draft developed in fall 2017, noting the need to strip out academic language, and highlighting that the document isn't a radically new vision, but more about organic growth of organization. Sigal introduces the strategy as a fuller expression of GV's current direction, not a radical reworking of it, and reminds everyone that that was the brief for this round - to articulate existing strategy. He notes that anything that steps away from core tenants and work would require significant buy-in from community and board. For that reason, the first draft of the strategy aims to present to the board where we are at present, so that we can discuss where we might go if we stay on the same track and also be a ground for discussing other directions.

Zuckerman noted the strategy feels similar to scaling up of SGV's current structure, but there was a gap in how the work is to be accomplished. Also voiced the need for clarity on the question of autonomy, particularly for sub-groups, noting feedback at the Summit that there is a desire among the community to conduct independent fundraising/crowdfunding, etc. Zuckerman voiced his belief that SGV is more likely to scale if fundraising is more diversified, and if the community is empowered to get involved. Sigal acknowledged the tension, and noted that if SGV makes the claim that scaling needs to happen, it needs to be grounded in specific outcomes.

Deane addressed SGV's mission, raised the potential to describe SGV's story as an incubator of talent (for newsrooms, non-profits, foundations, etc.) and projects (Advox, Rising Voices, NewsFrames, etc.), and communities and networks, which could be successful, rather than as something built on what the internet used to be. General agreement on this point.

MacKinnon noted that the strategy feels like it's rebalancing across sections. Sigal agreed and stated the hypothetical budget includes an emergence fund. MacKinnon related the need for reporting for various movements and topics that we aren't currently reporting on, and activities of broader community. Directors discussed the extent to which far right is using rhetoric the left used 15 years ago, and to what extent SGV wants to consciously insert ourselves in that fight? Sigal raised the question of whether SGV is supporting the community, or trying to specifically engage for social change. Zuckerman asserted that the SGV narrative (unheard voices without

optimal distribution) is an old narrative that doesn't sell in the current funding environment: Raised other potential narratives, including (1) nationalists took this narrative; (2) civic space is closing, making issue discussion challenging and imperative for the internet to serve as this space; (3) civil society is at threat, democracy is in retreat. SGV is one of the last platforms addressing this globally.

Zaman countered that SGV doesn't always support democracies if looking at particular countries - that if we use that framing for understanding our priorities, then we are inconsistent. MacKinnon raised democracy as a potential problematic term, suggesting pluralistic society, just/equitable society, accountable governance, etc., and the need for work to be done around precise language.

Sigal voiced core staff concerns that the strategy currently reads more about our effect on the world, not on how we support the community, and whether focusing on larger social scale issues results in leaving the community behind. MacKinnon asserted that SGV's response can't be to return to origins, and that there is a need to push forward. Zuckerman reiterated the need for a more equitable media environment, and that the strategy needs to have diagnosis (i.e. the world has more access to speech, but the question of how we listen equitably hasn't been addressed). Asserted the need to find new ways to get people engaged with the challenges. Deane concurred, stating that SGV used to have a very clear ToC - opening a space that wasn't open before, and questioned where the power in a new strategy will lie. He suggested it seems to rest in trust, but not sure where in the strategy this can be realized. MacKinnon suggested a shift from trust in institutions to trust in individuals, noting the trust element of GV community is critical, and how SGV scales trust in information amongst communities that's also rooted in values is compatible with the strategy doc.

Zuckerman agreed with the idea of trust being rooted in community, returning to the idea of chapters/outsourced fundraising/crowdsourcing and emphasizing SGV now has enough of an energy, style, model that summiteers could serve as ambassadors and see where their communities want to go. Also noted the group of donors that would never support SGV as a Netherlands organization, but could support chapters. Sigal responded that last year he spoke with ~10 universities to explore the chapters possibility. Found that chapters based in universities probably not an option, but courses are (the challenge with chapters is driving local incentive). Hernandez cautioned the need for this to be a flexible model, noting that for some countries/contributors, the idea of fundraising would be uncomfortable. Directors agreed.

Deane raised challenges associated with a similar organization, including (1) competition for funding; and (2) governance issues that could arise when developing autonomous bodies.

Zuckerman clarified he is not proposing full devolution of power, but rather, proposed decentralizing some things that are difficult to do from the center (reaching out to educational institutions, running workshops, etc). Questioned whether there is a way to unlock freedom to experiment and permission to fundraise - with strict guidelines, particularly with crowdfunding and local sponsors, many of whom would be put off by larger organization.

Sigal turned conversation to strategy budget, noting this plan would relieve stress on Newsroom production to allow SGV to cover the world in the way we want to.

Zuckerman highlighted issues that have been brought up during the meeting:

- What is the problem SGV is trying to solve;
- SGV has a scaling challenge;
- Question around how much authority goes to community sub-groups to raise money, have autonomy, etc.;
- How will SGV phrase/support the potential chapter model.

MacKinnon raised the issue of potential funding from a few candidate governments, whether there should be community discussion on the issue, and questioned whether SGV has done a risk assessment? Zuckerman confirmed SGV has respectability within bilateral and government community. He went on to acknowledge the success of Sigal/Popplewell keeping SGV moving despite very limited funding, but that the situation is not sustainable in the long run.

Nanabhay asked Sigal to frame an example of a radical departure from current strategy and vision. Sigal gave examples of making Rising Voices or Advox the center, or making issue of inclusion or this level of immersion/incubation the center. MacKinnon questioned whether Newsroom staff be on board. Sigal responded that this was not clear, and would require additional conversations.

Nanabhay questioned how restructuring might affect funding. Zukerman responded that, in some ways, this is already happening organically with Lingua through development of very strong community groups, so wouldn't be a radical re-think. Noted that funding solution could be found through (1) decentralization; (2) thinking about funding in new ways.

Directors held further discussion around the central problem SGV is trying to solve, and whether the focus should be trust, equity, or something else. MacKinnon noted the need to consider who the competitors are in each space. Sigal raised a key challenge being SGVs track record of attempting to develop a tight definitional frame, then struggling with the issue of whether SGV can define this on behalf of the community. Sigal agreed with Deane that the mission statement reads old, but as SGV determines mission statement, needs to be cognizant of how it's leading/engaging the community, and also that the mission statement can only be revised with community buy-in.