

Media Co-op AGM 2021-22

March 27, 2022

Notes: Scott Neigh

Attendees: Haseena Manek, Saima Desai, Elsie Dean, Valerie Barnes-Connell Jordan, Hugh Jordan, Rushdia Mehreen, Scott Neigh, David Gray-Donald

1. Designated Facilitator: David Gray-Donald

2. Designated Secretary: Scott Neigh

3. The attendees listed above introduced themselves, talked about their relationship to The Media Co-op and to grassroots media work more generally, and acknowledged the territories they were speaking from.

4. The proposed agenda can be found in this post: <https://mediacoop.ca/node/119043>. David moved that the agenda be approved. Valerie seconded the motion. No objections.

5. The minutes from the 2020-2021 AGM can be found here: <https://mediacoop.ca/file/40145/download?token=M6oXTdiE>. David moved that the minutes be accepted. Valerie seconded the motion. No objections.

At this point, David suggested that we change the order in which we do the agenda items. In order to avoid losing quorum, he suggested that we next move to "8. Election of Representatives to the Board of Directors" and "9. Presentation of 2020-21 Financial Review." This met with approval from the meeting.

8. David talked briefly about the structure of the organization (<https://mediacoop.ca/historyandstructure2021>) and the board (<https://mediacoop.ca/boardbios2021>). We currently have four open positions on the board – two for readers, one for a contributor, and one for an editor. No nominations for the board were received before the meeting. David is the only current member whose three-year term has expired and who was therefore up for renewal. He also invited anyone attending the meeting to put their name forward. People can also join between AGMs – the board has to give interim approval, which then must be ratified by the next AGM – so anyone considering it could also express interest at a later date. There was some discussion about the fate of the attempt in earlier years to organize a Saskatchewan local of the co-op. Rushdia said she was considering putting her name forward but wanted to hear the discussion about the year in review and the organization's capacity issues before deciding.

David moved that he be acclaimed for a three-year renewal of his term as an editor representative on the board of directors. Valerie seconded the motion. No objections.

David then suggested that the meeting move on and then re-visit this item at the end of the meeting.

9. David walked the meeting through the financial statements for 2020-2021, which are included in the body of this post: <https://mediacoop.ca/node/119043>.

Income – Monthly sustainer donations have been decreasing steadily over several years. The financial year being reported here included the first fundraiser the organization had held in several years, so the one-time donations were much larger than in recent years. And the organization neither applied for nor received any grants.

Expenses – The largest expense is paying freelance journalists. There was also a substantial expenditure on website infrastructure. The high interest and bank charges could probably be reduced in future years by changing services to better fit the current needs of the organization and/or by negotiating with providers. Rent charges are not for physical space but for a mailing address at the Centre for Social Innovation. That was established part way through the year, so will likely go up in future years.

Balance sheet – The substantially improved balance in the bank account over the course of the year was due to the successful fundraiser later in the year. The estimated liabilities were related to the cessation of publication of *The Dominion* in 2015 or 2016, for subscriptions that had been paid for but not fulfilled. In the following fiscal year (i.e. last calendar year) we met our legal requirements for contacting former subscribers and offered them either a refund or to transfer their subscription to *Briarpatch*, and the actual outlay of money for that was far lower than the estimated liability.

Rushdia asked about the category of "Miscellaneous Expenses." David was not sure. He guessed that it was either an automated refund of a monthly donation that was bouncing each month or a recurring donation by the co-op to another organization, but he was not sure.

David moved that the financial statements be accepted, pending review by an accountant. Scott seconded. No objections.

The meeting then moved back up in the agenda.

6. David presented a brief summary of the organization's activities since the last AGM. He emphasized the relatively low capacity of the board. Despite that, we were able to continue to regularly publish articles on a range of issues, including related to Indigenous-led land defence struggles, policing and prisons, and a range of other things. Early in the year, we increased our top rate – generally for pieces requiring significant reporting – to \$250 per article. In August, we hired Sophie Birks to do social media work for the organization for one month. It is not the kind of thing we can afford on an ongoing basis at this point, but it was a successful experiment. The overall financial situation of the organization is okay. We have \$1500 in the bank with a further \$500 soon to arrive there from our PayPal account, and no liabilities. In the near future, Sharmeen Khan will be facilitating a strategic planning process for the board. Sharmeen was involved in the co-op in earlier years and has a long history in grassroots media and radical organizing.

Scott then talked specifically about the website update process. The prior Media Co-op website was more or less the same one that had been in place since the organization launched its online presence. Efforts to update it had begun around 2017. A web designer was hired to come up with a new design, and the plan was to put that new design in place at the same time as doing a major version upgrade of the content management system that the site runs on, which is called Drupal. The implementation in those years fell to a former board member, who did a fair bit of the necessary work, but then his personal circumstances changed and he was no longer able to work on it so the process stalled. Things were started up again in early 2021. This involved taking all of the content from the local (e.g. Toronto, Vancouver, Halifax, etc.) sites, which have been inactive for a number of years, and turning them into

static archives. And it meant implementing the remaining pieces of the design and functionality to be able to launch the new site. It was largely Scott who facilitated that process, with lots of support from the same former board member and from our contact with the resist.ca hosting collective. The site launched in September, followed of course by lots of work to fix bugs that weren't caught before and. Currently, there are still a few rough edges in the new site, but it is up and functioning.

There were no questions.

7. We then moved into the conversation about organizational capacity. David and Scott both talked briefly about the situation. Basically, we are currently in a state where we are able to do the same kinds of things that have been our basic activities for some time now, but that takes most of the labour that the current board has available. In order to be effective and to thrive, we need to be asking questions about how we fit into the larger grassroots media landscape in Canada – a landscape that is very different than when The Media Co-op was founded in the mid-2000s, and that has seen many new broadly left outlets appear in recent years. But we have had difficulty even effectively asking those questions, let alone finding ways to act on the answers. There seems to be some scope for The Media Co-op to take up some distinctive space, perhaps in terms of how we relate to social movements and in terms of a commitment to movement journalism rather than commentary, but it is not clear what that means or what, given our current low capacity, we can do about it.

Rushdia asked about whether we understood this as mostly a need for money or a need for people, and who those people might be? And how might the organization build relationships with movements?

David expressed caution about trying to give a complete answer. Certainly, the people currently involved in the organization are very busy, and sometimes it seems like even a relatively small but regular input of energy could do a lot to enhance the organization's capacity. On the other hand, it could well take much more substantial increase in available energy and time to really move beyond the current status quo.

Scott talked about the fact that the board has had discussions about whether it makes sense to prioritize getting money and paying for labour, or whether to relate to it as an organizing problem and attempt to increase capacity that way. The process with Sharmeen will likely get into these questions.

There was then a bit more clarification about that process, which will involve Sharmeen meeting with the board in the next few months to help us come up with a plan to move forward.

Haseena suggested that one model might be partnering with other organizations, perhaps journalism schools or other organizations, to offer fellowship opportunities for early career journalists. In particular, there do not seem to be many such opportunities for folks wanting to do work informed explicitly by left politics. Could be paid or for academic credit.

Valerie talked about examples from Regina, and asked about the Local Journalism Initiative and whether that might be a source of funding.

David clarified that, at least as of his last look at it, it would be very hard for The Media Co-op to qualify for that funding.

Valerie suggested attention to high profile local issues, like a struggle against a peat mining project in northern Saskatchewan that she is involved in.

Scott talked about the co-op's partnership with Winnipeg Police Cause Harm in mid-2021. WPOCH was starting a project soliciting articles related to police abolition. We offered to partner, which allowed them to offer more money and allowed the articles to get broader reach, while it also got great content for our site. This could be a model for future partnerships, though in other situations it might take considerably more labour on our end to make it work.

Rushdia asked if the increase in rates led to an increase in submissions.

David then talked about our attempt last summer to have a project investing significant resources to get coverage of the Trans Mountain tar sands pipeline expansion project and the struggle against it. Despite deciding to spend \$3000, and attempting couple of different models to entice journalists, the project was almost entirely unsuccessful. Meaning that money on its own does not seem to be enough to get content.

Scott agreed that the increase in rates did not seem to have much impact on the number of submissions we were getting. In addition, it seemed that when we would do a call for submissions, it would get circulated more via networks in the US and elsewhere in the world than in Canada itself. That led to us getting some great content last year from, say, India and Brazil, but leaves the question of how to get more submissions from within Canada unanswered.

Haseena affirmed that the \$250 rate, while certainly not the best out there, isn't bad.

Rushdia suggested that there may be room to do more focused kinds of outreach, including to journalism schools and to movement organizations like Solidarity Across Borders.

Hugh wondered if The Media Co-op could do more to cover the question of the poor state of COVID monitoring in Saskatchewan and elsewhere.

David agreed that was very important, but that kind of story is very labour intensive and it is not clear how we could do that right now.

Valerie talked about trying to do some of that kind of reporting in her local work in northern Saskatchewan, but has had a hard time getting responses from governments.

For the final 15 minutes of the meeting, David asked attendees about their impressions of what The Media Co-op currently does well and what more or what else we could be doing.

Elsie suggested covering the conflict between corporate pseudo-solutions and Indigenous solutions playing out at the level of the international climate change conferences and in other contexts.

David agreed that's very important, and he hopes to have time to do related writing himself.

Hugh suggested the ongoing refusal by the Catholic Church to take responsibility for its role in residential schools.

Saima said that she particularly likes how long The Media Co-op has been around. So one useful kind of piece might be looking back on particular moments or issues or struggles in past decades and

examining what we can learn from that today, similar to a piece published last year by former Media Co-op contributor Meghan Kinch in *Midnight Sun*, which looked back at Occupy.

8. (continued). David then circled back to the question of board membership, and asked if anyone wanted to put their name forward. Rushdia asked about time commitment and meeting frequency. David clarified that we have generally meet every 3 or 4 weeks, and the time commitment is highly variable. Rushdia put her name forward. There was some discussion about what category she fit best in, reader or contributor, and ultimately decided on contributor. Hugh also considered putting his name forward to join the board, but decided to reflect on it further.

David moved that we acclaim Rushdia as a contributor member of the board of directors. Haseena seconded the motion. No objections.

11. David asked if anyone had any other business to discuss. There was none.

David moved that the meeting be adjourned. Hugh seconded the motion. No objections.