

AAJA 2022 Fall/Winter Board Meeting Minutes

Advisory board meeting

Saturday, December 10, 2022

4 p.m. - 7 p.m. ET

On Zoom

Board of Directors members present: Michelle Lee, Nicole Dungca, Kris Vera-Phillips, Jin Ding, Julia B. Chan, Shirley Qiu, Julia M. Chan, Ben Pu, Aric Johnson, Anika Varty, Moriah Balingit, Julia B. Chan (arrived later), Frank Bi (incoming SVP)

Advisory board/AG members present: Moni Basu, Samantha Masunaga, Wes Nakama, Nancy Yang, Daigo Fujiwara, Kristine Villanueva, Peter Wong, Sameer Rao, Mallika Kallingal, Bobby Calvin, Rahul Bali, Josh Tolentino, Hangda Zhang, Mariecar Mendoza, Alex Lim, Rachel Ramirez, Heather Chin, Cody Hmelar, Nandita Godbole, Chris Nguyen, Sandeep Chandok (arrived later), Erin Chan Ding (arrived later), Anh Do (arrived later)

National staff present: Naomi Tacuyan Underwood, Ai Uchida, Glenn Sugihara

Advisory board members not present: K. Oanh Ha, Zela Chin, Jenny Hsu, Ariel Cheung, Ambreen Ali, Corinne Chin, Erin Chan Ding, Cecilia Lei, Priya Sridhar, JoAnn Fields

Michelle called to order at 4:04 p.m. ET.

Budget update/HQ update (Naomi and Glenn)

Naomi: Steady growth in budget since 2019. We've been working hard to diversify our revenue sources.

Glenn: Organization is very strong, cash flow wise. Net operating proceeds are at a slight loss because of accrued accounting.

Naomi: How that works is we had so many commitments booked in 2021 and the terms of those grants were that they'd be spent in 2021, 2022, and through 2024.

Glenn: The norm for nonprofits is accrued accounting. Though on paper we have a slight loss, money that we booked in 2021 covers that.

Darrell: How many organizations are we fiscal sponsors for?

Naomi: 4. If we can be of help to an organization and their mission dovetails with ours, we figure out a way to help out.

We'll be continuing with our mental health/wellness program. We still have about \$10K in our mental health fund – please encourage members to apply if needed.

We're excited to launch a new program for high schoolers, in partnership with Cal Matters (soon to be announced publicly).

We also want to continue the work we did with the broadcast snapshot project. Potentially do this for mastheads – more related to print and digital publications.

We want to pilot a second Hall of Fame event. We want to make this a standalone fundraising program.

Convention updates (Naomi)

The LA convention attracted 1,500 attendees. It was the biggest convention in recent years.

We wrapped up our 40th anniversary work with the launch of the Hall of Fame. We also had our first-ever gathering of AAPI nonprofit leaders.

A look ahead at DC: We are currently talking to funders and sponsors. We're at the Capital Hilton. Room rate is \$189/night. Call for a planning committee coming soon. Convention dates: July 19-22, 2023.

We're considering raising registration rates. In 2019 the board kept rates the same. Regular rates did not apply during 2020 and 2021. In light of the increasing costs of everything, we're proposing a \$20 increase for each level.

Nicole: The governing board will vote on this and take into account any concerns. For awareness, this is cheaper than other registration rates for other organizations.

Jin: Generally our conventions are smaller but the costs are not actually lower; because we have less attendees, the costs are actually higher per person.

Naomi: We're also proposing charging for gala tickets separately. The average cost for a plated dinner is \$100/person. In recent years we haven't charged for the gala dinner separately. Other journalism orgs charge separately for their dinner – from \$100-\$200 extra.

As we've revamped rewards, we want to use the gala and Hall of Fame to bring prestige, visibility in a way we haven't before. We would charge \$100 per ticket. We would be flexible to accommodate stakeholders and students. Last convention, we ended up losing money to 5-8 empty tables.

Darrell: I think you'll get a lot of pushback because historically we've never charged for the gala separately. I don't think we'll have a problem with no shows if everyone can be accommodated.

Cody: We could charge for 50% of the ticket to keep the price lower.

Ben: I'd suggest not charging the full \$100 for dinner. Sticker shock might be too high.

Anh: I think it makes more sense to keep it together with the convention price. People might get confused about it being separate and resist that. To do it separately will inspire a lot of people to walk away, they would just go out to dinner. But they might understand if we fold it into the registration price.

Anika: For people who don't have a lot of experience with the convention, I don't know what the level of excitement and interest would be for the gala. Cost will be a big factor.

Cody (in chat): Would it make sense during the phase in (if passed), to do a 50% subsidization from national on gala price/head?

Kris (in chat): Building on Cody's idea: 50% of ticket... with an option to donate more to cover for fellow members?

Sameer (in chat): So we're sure, is there any concern on losing money on the gala if we make it ticketed at that cost? Worth noting that DC Chinatown's about a mile away from the convention hotel -- and a convention full of APIAs might find food they'd like more there than at these galas tbh

Rachel (in chat): As the co-director of yung AAJA, agree with Anika just said. Affordability will be a key thing. It would fall on the convention planners to create some sort of incentive that would get them excited to attend.

Sandeep: Given all the instability of the economy, thinking about students/early career journalists, and a lot of people already leave before the gala. If we were to charge for that, more people will be inclined to leave early or do their own thing. We want to be inclusive. For students, it's already hard, and they're trying to cut costs wherever they can. There's also no age restriction for people who aren't 21 yet.

Moriah (in chat): Want to raise the point, too, that by charging for gala we're giving people who would rather not pay for the gala the option to pay less and to not subsidize those who do want to attend.

Darrell (in chat): if we're still making a profit on the convention, i don't think we need to charge separately for dinner. we can raise the rate of convention, which people will accept.

Julia B.: The issue with empty tables at the LA gala was a communication issue. Could we look at this year as a test year to fill tables with a better communication plan?

Michelle: The problem is this has been an ongoing concern, the cost of gala. The unpredictability of gala attendance is something HQ has to deal with every year. This is a step toward trying to rectify that from a cost perspective. We'll take all these concerns and discuss them at the board meeting tomorrow. If we could adjust the rate instead of charging separately for gala that might be a better approach.

Chris: One of the things that happened this year was that AAJA convention dates were shorter than our peer organizations. Some of our members we sponsored lost out on the hotel for the final night. Our peer organizations advertise Saturday into Sunday. Is there a way to advertise our convention as a Sunday end date to help our members who do get sponsorships?

Naomi: I want to encourage us all to decide on a process for choosing future convention cities. For NABJ/NAHJ, contracts go through 2026. In other organizations, chapters make bids to host the convention.

Because we've been largely bicoastal (except Houston and Las Vegas), we'd like to propose Chicago, Twin Cities, Phoenix for 2024.

Michelle: 2024 is a presidential year, and Phoenix would be in a swing state.

Aric: In Phoenix, May is definitely more tolerable than July.

Chris: I would love to see a convention in Chicago. Coming off of DC, Chicago would make sense because it's relatively affordable.

Cody (in chat): If travel is a concern, Chicago and Dallas are travel hubs that fit geographic rotation. If we're able to negotiate hotel contracts earlier, we may be able to negotiate a better rate

Nandita: Thinking about students/younger members, affordable transit is something to consider too. In LA it was a bit more difficult to get around.

Heather (in chat): Some members might be seeking to avoid investing in states considered legally dangerous for them, as well

Naomi (in chat): Also taking into consideration J-Schools, ASU would be a great academic partner in PHX

Heather (in chat): also we may want to consider the possibility of scotus or other legislation popping up that results in last minute boycotts and AAJA needing to decide what to do. We can avoid that by sticking with options like Chicago, Phoenix, and Detroit.

Julia M. (in chat): Chicago is great. Two major airports. Lots of amenities. Not blaring hot in the summer (usually)

Took a break at 5:44 p.m. Resumed at 5:47 p.m. ET.

Endowment campaign & Ambassador Circle (Naomi, Jin, Nicole)

Naomi: Planning to launch a new endowment campaign going into 2023. We draw from the interest to go toward the operations/programs. We previously had a campaign, which has grown to \$2.1M over time.

An endowment is a way to help stabilize AAJA, but it would come down the road. We would want the reserve to be \$5M. Cultivate high level donors, have vehicles like the Hall of Fame fundraising event to go into the campaign. There aren't any actionables around this but wanted to make you aware of the direction we're moving. Jin and I are working closely with a development consultant, who helped launch a Korean American group's endowment campaign. The goal is for this endowment to be here long after we're all gone.

Jin: I think AAJA is in a really good financial position to relaunch this campaign right now. We took a few years to build out our staff/consultants since Naomi joined.

Endowments are usually raised by people who have a strong interest in the organization. We're thinking about starting a pioneer circle, people who give a high amount to our endowment and ask others in their circles to donate.

We're aiming for a \$10M endowment down the road.

Programs update (Kris)

Had 100 mentor/mentee pairings in 2022. Looking to expand J-Camp to 30 students in 2023. 20 mid-career journalists selected for ELP in 2022; 19 mid-career journalists selected for Asia program. 21 college students selected for VOICES this year. Currently in a leadership transition for next year, and looking to revamp the program to center it on student experiences.

Darrell: Could we change VOICES director terms so that directors don't both change in the same year?

Kris: Yes that's a good idea, we will consider that.

Ben: What was the feedback we got from students?

Rachel: +1, and we got a lot of feedback in Yung AAJA. Is there a way we could better collaborate in the future?

Kris: Feedback was mostly logistical issues, taking into consideration the diverse economic backgrounds students came from. And I love that idea. People were speaking out about their experience and expectations, and I think we should empower VOICES alumni to help shape the program.

Daigo: How was last year's ELP program re: virtual?

Kris: Paul is still debating whether to sync it with the convention next year.

Naomi: It will be hybrid next year.

AAJA Style revamp (Nicole)

In the coming year or two, we're hoping to get a group together to create a new style guide. Doing a lot of work through Media Watch, like the use of the word "kamikaze drone." Those are the types of things we'll be putting into the style guide. Naomi also just heard we got funding for this.

If anybody is interested, please reach out.

Moni: It's really important to get these style guides to journalism schools around the country. They don't even know it exists usually (most students just learn AP style).

Affinity group renewal (Nicole)

We have to renew the AGs every year. There will be a new LGBTQIA+ group. We'll likely change the bylaws so that AGs can renew every other year rather than yearly.

Camp AAJA (Shirley)

Camp AAJA will be Feb 4, 2023, 7-10 pm ET / Sun 8-11 am HKT. This will be an opportunity for our members/leaders to come together, get leadership development.

AAJA policy guide – code of conduct (Michelle)

We started engaging outside HR investigators to handle claims for code of conduct violations. The board discusses the findings of the investigation in a closed door meeting. After the board decides on an appropriate action, the president, SVP, executive director informs the perpetrator of the decision in writing.

For National complaints, National will cover the costs of the outside investigator. If the complaint is in a chapter/AG, they will have to cover the costs and handle the decision making, which they'll communicate with the board.

Decisions are case by case at the moment, because each case has been very different.

We recommend putting Code of Conduct in every registration you have as well. We could put together a memo to share best practices/protocols.

Chris: It would be helpful to see main talking points to share out with our chapters, if anything is decided at the Board of Directors meeting.

Michelle: That's a good point. Slack could be a good place for that.

AAJA Awards revamp (Julia M.)

We handled 2 years' worth of awards and handed out about 65 awards. It meant a lot to be able to connect with the local Korean newspapers for their awards after the Atlanta shootings.

Planning to keep the same awards categories in the coming year. We're looking for judges – want to lock this in early by Jan. 15. We're also looking for volunteers to help with planning.

Departing officers (Nicole)

Thank you to departing board members: Michelle Lee, Julia B. Chan, Julia M. Chan, Ben Pu.

Ben Pu motions to close at 7:03 p.m., Julia B. Chan seconds. Meeting ends at 7:04 p.m.

Board of Directors meeting

Sunday, December 11, 2022

4 p.m. - 7 p.m. ET

On Zoom

Board of Directors members present: Michelle Lee, Nicole Dungca, Kris Vera-Phillips, Jin Ding, Julia B. Chan, Shirley Qiu, Julia M. Chan, Ben Pu, Aric Johnson, Anika Varty, Moriah Balingit

AAJA staff present: Naomi Tacuyan Underwood, Ai Uchida. Lisa Keitges joined later to discuss the endowment.

Michelle called to order at 4:05 p.m. ET. Shirley called roll.

AAJA HQ & 2022 Budget update (Naomi Tacuyan Underwood)

Michelle: What is the Vincent Chin Memorial Fund?

Naomi: It's a scholarship fund that National gives out.

Michelle: The board needs a solid handle of what the scholarships are.

Nicole: Why was there such a big jump in VOICES budget?

Naomi: Corporate sponsors can now pick which programs they want their funds to go to.

Kris: What is the line item "pending"?

Naomi: That's for new prospects – maybe we've asked in the past but they haven't come through. That's our stretch.

Aric: I see USC on there for the 2023 budget, but the amount they gave this year might not be the level we see next year since our convention won't be in the area. Also Gannett might not come through with the same amount given recent layoffs.

Naomi: Appreciate that insight.

Jin: It's helpful to look at this by category rather than individual line items.

Naomi: I just learned that the grant we applied for with the Asian American Foundation was approved, so we have \$200K coming. They're most interested in core pillars 3 and 4, thought leadership and policy.

Ben motions to approve the 2023 budget. Jin seconds. Budget gets approved.

Naomi: For the CRM update, we've migrated to Member Suite, which was our association management system before Nation Builder. It will be a high learning curve but it's the most suited for a membership association. We should make sure to remind people to log into their Member Suite.

Convention 2023 (Jin Ding, Naomi Tacuyan Underwood & Michelle Lee)

Naomi: The strategic advantage for Chicago: good place to cultivate donors. Strategic advantage for Phoenix: it's a swing state for the 2024 elections.

Michelle: The opportunity to engage funders is important but can happen throughout the year. It's worth considering the political power of that year. I expect that NABJ and NAHJ are going to go that route.

Ben: For 2023, NABJ in Miami, NAHJ in Birmingham. Are there a lot of Asians in Arizona? Will this attract presidential candidates?

Naomi: If NABJ and NAHJ is in Chicago in 2024, why are we considering that?

Moriah: I liked Michelle's point that we can actually change the narrative and shape the dialogue. I do see Ben's point though that if we want to attract a candidate, they would want somewhere they could also do campaigning.

What was the issue in Vegas?

Aric: A lot of the vendors were unhappy. Caesar's Palace was not a good convention location because of how far you have to walk from hotel rooms to the conference programming.

For AZ, the heat is going to be the main issue. The problem with the resorts is you have to get out and drive to them. But it will be affordable.

Kris: In addition to Asian groups, our chapter has worked with a lot of Asian businesses and partnered with Asian entrepreneurs. If people are thinking, it's too hot, it does cool off if you go north. Arizona is a significant border state as well.

Michelle: We could definitely talk about immigration and the emerging AAPI vote.

Ben: I was wondering if Asian interest groups are doing conventions planned for 2024 yet and if we could reach out to build a coalition with them.

Nicole: The vast majority of big media that can send a lot of people will likely send less people to Phoenix. You'll probably get more West Coast members. When we were in Vegas, we got surrogates for every candidate, if not the candidate themselves.

Michelle: I think we should work backwards – what is our goal for 2024? What will help us get there? If the goal is for AAJA to have a voice in the presidential election, we have to figure out what that voice is.

Jin: If we do go to Phoenix, we have a reason to talk to NAJA, especially if we think our membership will not pull a big crowd. However I hear the concerns about the workload. If we go that route, I'd recommend a 2-3 year runway rather than a 1.5 year runway.

Nicole: If we want to do a presidential town hall, we do have to start that immediately.

Michelle: If there's one thing I could emphasize is to make sure all our decisions go back to the strategic plan.

VOICES feedback (Nicole)

Nicole: A lot of the cohort did have feedback, especially with the logistical issue of being in a different hotel. They also had some feedback about the way people were phrasing the lessons they had about dress code. Some of the cohort wasn't appreciative of some of the sponsors they would be going to. At one point, several students sent a letter to members of the board asking us to consider pausing it for the year.

We spoke with a lot of people about it and we can implement a lot of the feedback for the program in DC next year. They will have new leaders who can revamp the program. You'll note that a lot of recent projects have been very professional level but we want to create an experience that doesn't stress all the students out.

We'll also consider things like scholarships for some students. We can't immediately offer stipends to the mentors/students but that's something we'll consider. But we can offer some scholarships since the students come from different socioeconomic background.

We will recruit new leaders because the leaders have finished their 2-year term.

Kris: I also spoke with a number of students, faculty members and the leaders. I am committed to making sure we'll center the experience around students and expanding their horizons, allow them to attend programming, find mentors for them.

For potential candidates for leadership, we've identified a few. HQ will be taking a bigger lead on logistics rather than relying on volunteers. For some students, this might be the first time they're traveling on a plane. We want to be sensitive to different students' backgrounds.

Jin: How are we dividing all the logistical work between volunteers and HQ? Many of the volunteers are journalists and good at journalism but may not be as strong at logistics. So I wonder if we do a callout for specifically people who are strong at logistics, like a producer role.

Kris: What might be really useful for the board is to see the report that Waliya put together.

Julia B.: Journalists have expertise in some things but maybe not for program planning, building equitable systems. I wonder if there's a conversation we could have about resources for resetting this program – could we talk to a consultant? If we're able to lay clearer groundwork to clarify expectations, we could rebuild a more equitable program.

Michelle: I think we need to make sure we're giving students a good experience but also make sure we're preparing them for what it will be like in the industry.

Naomi: Operationally, when I first arrived at AAJA, what was highly uncomfortable was that all our programming was volunteer-run. I really appreciated what Julia B. Chan said about program design. We can't program around the difficulties of a newsroom but are we hitting a good balance between journalistic rigor and nurturing our future journalists?

Took a 5 minute break at 5:30 p.m. ET. Resumed at 5:35 p.m. ET.

Awards Revamp (Julia M. Chan)

Suzanne Ahn Award – we thought this money ran out but found out that's not the case. We had talked about retiring the award a couple years ago because we thought the money had run out, we didn't have a strong connection with the family, and thought about changing it to something else, like the Helen Zia award. But doing so would involve a delicate conversation with the Ahn family and discussing with Helen. So we ended up keeping the award, which eventually led to other issues.

So after everything, we decided to retire the reward. But there is still money left. Is the money to sponsor the award or as a cash prize?

Naomi: Cash prize.

Julia M.: We haven't disbursed the cash prize yet but can do that.

Naomi: So it goes back to, how much can we leverage this prize?

Nicole: If it's in an investment account, won't it exist into perpetuity? Let's think about a sustainable answer.

Naomi: With no market, it will last 40+ more years.

Jin: We should consider a larger gift that will give this award a better response rate. We could make this the biggest cash award in AAJA.

Naomi: This money is restricted for this award but that doesn't mean we can't talk with the family and pivot the award to something, like a trailblazer award, that the family would agree to?

Julia B.: Maybe we should do some fact-finding here. What does the family want for this award? What do they want the legacy to be? That might help answer some questions for us.

Jin: Let's also tie this back to the strategic plan.

Julia M.: Thinking about adopting a zero tolerance policy for awards – if you're attempting to affect the outcome of a vote, we won't allow that. I would recommend an expulsion or permanent ban from awards consideration in the future.

I won't be here on the board in 2023 (but will still work on awards), so wanted to flag that we should make sure someone on the board is keyed in/helping out.

Jin: Do the awards fall under anyone's responsibility on the board?

Nicole: Not currently under anyone's purview officially.

Michelle: I think it would make sense to fall under VP of Comms.

Affinity Group approval (Nicole)

Nicole: Enterprise has not been in the mix for a while. There's a leadership vacuum in Features Forum. Small Market Broadcast goes through transitions all the time based on the nature of their group.

AAJA Plus and Pacific Island Task Force are not ready to become official AGs.

Ben motions to approve the AGs, Nicole seconds.

Endowment and fundraising circle (Lisa Keitges)

Lisa: My recommendation is to change the memo around the endowment to make it more flexible. My understanding is that this would require a board vote.

Naomi: We won't be voting on this today but wanted to share the language today.

Lisa: We want to raise a total of \$10M, with an initial \$5M seed gift. We currently have a \$2M ask out there. You don't want campaigns that drag on forever, so it's quicker to focus the campaign on fewer big gifts rather than lots of smaller gifts.

Naomi: Going into 2023, we're looking to have lots of 1:1 conversations in Q1, publicly announce it at convention. We want to have commitments secured before we announce it publicly.

Lisa: We want to get the larger gifts before the convention.

Ben: What's the messaging around creating an endowment?

Lisa: An endowment allows us to be flexible. We could launch new programs, try new things. I wouldn't say we would have to fundraise less in the future, but we could fundraise more specifically rather than more generally.

Votes (Michelle)

Code of Conduct:

Jin: If we share a version of this with the public, we should have our lawyers look over it and simplify that, make sure we only share what we need to share.

HQ needs to make sure all chapter leaders sign NDA. Before we start Camp AAJA, we need these documents to be signed. In the onboarding part, let's specifically mention it.

Kris: People who are thinking about filing complaints would probably appreciate seeing a simple version of this online.

Moriah: If we want to limit the public exposure, we could also say we'll communicate with that person over the phone.

Ben motions to approve the document. Jin seconds. Document is approved.

Convention rates:

Julia B.: At ONA, there's a criteria for getting free gala tickets. Ideally we want the nominees and winners to be there. Who falls in that bucket of free tickets? Worth looking into.

Ben: If we keep the rates as is, does that mean the next convention would be a loser of funds?

Naomi: Can't predict either way, unfortunately.

Jin: The general programming part merits a rate increase because of increasing costs. On top of that is the actual gala itself.

Michelle: If our goal is trying to recoup the cost of gala, eventually we'll have to raise the rate or create a separate gala ticket price. I know a lot of people are tied to a free gala dinner. But this year we had a lot of new attendees who didn't take gala attendance as a given. This gives us an opportunity to reset expectations around gala. If people don't find it worth the money, I'd be fine with it being a more exclusive, formal event, or an intimate conversation.

The gala is supposed to be a celebration of awards and deliver our final message at convention.

Anika: Do people have luck explaining why they have to go to gala if their employer is covering it?

Julia B.: I want to amplify the idea of a survey to hear directly from members. We currently don't know why people attend gala. The costs and value propositions are all tangible things we could ask about.

Michelle: I appreciate the idea of a survey but historically we've had a very low response rate that is skewed by a small vocal group.

Jin: I would advocate against charging \$25 for a separate gala ticket because it'll tell others gala is only worth \$25 and will make it more difficult to eventually raise that to the actual cost, which is \$100. Even if we don't charge for the gala, we should start communications this year on how much the gala value is.

I will regroup with Naomi to write up a new registration rate pricing sheet and share with the board.

3-year officer terms (Nicole)

Nicole: There's an impression that a 3-year presidential term would be more helpful: 1 year for transitioning, 1 year feeling comfortable with what you're doing and 1 year focusing on transitioning to your successor. This would go into effect after my term.

Michelle: I've served 4 years, which is way too many. 2 is too short. 3 is the sweet spot. This is for future consideration for this board.

Jin: Currently the board members' terms alternate – so we don't want to end up in a situation where everyone is up for reelection in the same year and everyone on the board leaves.

Anika: Was it beneficial to serve as SVP before becoming President?

Meeting minutes (Shirley)

Shirley: We can coordinate this on Slack. Will work with Ai to get the meeting minutes up.

Jin motioned to enter closed session at 7:18 p.m. Ben seconded. Entered closed session.

Came out of closed session at 7:34 p.m.

Ben motions to adjourn at 7:35 p.m. Julia B. Chan seconds. Meeting adjourns.