



American Water Works Association **Pacific Northwest** Section

2023 Board Strategic Planning Meeting Minutes

Thursday and Friday, July 20 and 21, 2023

Mount Washington Room, Alderbrook Resort

The 2023 strategic planning session began at 9:00 a.m. Present at the meeting were Chair Dan Sleeth, Chair Elect Nick Belmont, Past President Michelle Cheek, Trustees Libby Barg Bakke, Joel Cary, Jolene Gibson, Chandra Hingston, Erika Murphy, and Tony Reiss, AWWA Director James Dean, Treasurer Jason Canady and Executive Director Kyle Kihs.

Kyle Kihs welcomed the group and introduced the day's facilitator, Pat Dwyer.

Mr. Dwyer, who has a history in comedy improv, outlined the plans and expectations for the day, saying he will demonstrate how improvisation tenets relate to the skills relevant to leadership, communication and public speaking.

The group participated in a series of exercises that showed how these applications work in real time.

After a break, the group took a greater look at the challenges of leadership and helped define characteristics of a good leader. They also examined how leaders serve and motivate their members and volunteers.

Trustee – Volunteer Relationship

- Most volunteers join because they have a good time, and there is networking and communication with peers; moving to the next step involves a degree of responsibility.
- How can committees be encouraged to achieve their goals?
 - Let people bring ideas to the table.
 - Be open to ideas; determine what excites people.
 - Events that get people together are fine but they are not currently moving the ball forward. Committees need to meet, brainstorm, and fulfill commitments (example: providing the number of trainings planned).
 - Trustee leaders must reach out and follow through even though it is difficult to keep all balls in the air with other life responsibilities.

Providing effective volunteer leadership

- Communication is key; includes direct and specific calls to action, setting clear direction and deadlines.
- Remind volunteers they are accountable.
- Seek assistance from the Board if needed when you have a non-functioning committee. The Executive Committee meets monthly and can help deal with problems between quarterly meetings.
- Don't depend on blanket e-mails – target specific invitations and task individuals to respond.
- Establish expectations and goals, make them tangible.
- Make a team, not an island.
- Change patterning of e-mail – insert something that elicits a response.
- Understand the organization's goals, both section and national.
- Be a good facilitator – grease the skids, don't do the work.
- Understand individual volunteer strengths and weaknesses.
- Engage in purposeful networking.
- Be aware of burnout at the top; help with succession planning.
- Lead by example.
- Do one on one outreach.
- Empower teams to take work on and make them want to accomplish their goals.
- Respond to them and let them know the best way to reach you, whether by phone, e-mail or other.
- Engage in frequent communication, start early.
- Engage in goal setting and expectations.
- Be inspirational, not intimidating.
- Be present and available, build trust, do what you say you will do.
- Build trust
 - Have fun.
 - Follow through.
 - Self-deprecating humor.
 - Note how this has changed, go toward the non-hurtful, non-deprecating, think “Ted Lasso” – joyful and helpful comedy
 - Connect as people before you get to business.
 - Create perception of “being around”.

How to deal with virtual meetings

- Encourage “camera on”.
- Don’t go into presentation mode.
- Call on people politely and kindly to get them involved.
- Start with a question or a game.
- Actually raise hands instead of using Zoom tool.
- Take into account different learning styles.
- Never read your slides word for word.
- Show a goofy picture with facts.
- Remove emotion by being organized.

Using Humor Strategically (skills needed to construct and deliver a good presentation in either a live or virtual environment.

- Humor gets you trust from your audience; don’t be afraid to be playful or goofy.
- Snowball – build one thing on the next by compounding information and having a logical structure.
- Give energy boosts – speed up the tempo.
- End on a good note, a good feeling at the end is a principle of story structure.
- Make them want more.
- Let the audience put themselves into the presentation.

AWWA 2050 Initiative – How to prepare for the future of the organization.

It was noted that the Section was tasked to survey Trustees and the membership about the initiative. Although all trustees responded, only seven responses were received from a membership of 2500. How can we bring this to the forefront for members and how will training at Lake Chelan be geared to this task.

Kihs has asked Jude Grounds and Cole Benak, to assist in engaging members and facilitating a discussion at the Fall training.

AWWA Representative James Dean stated there was discussion at the last AWWA Board meeting about the Water 2050 concept, specifically why the year 2050 was targeted. Some think that is too far in the future and most current members may not be involved in the industry at that point. He noted there will probably be a movement by current members from the focus of “what do we want water to look like in 2050” to “how do we sustain water to 2050” hoping this concept help people think about what they can do today to influence that.

This led to a discussion of what kind of trainings will prepare the membership for the future.

Trainings: What are the challenges?

- Understanding what the training is.
- Making it local and relevant.
- Understanding different challenges from state to state or regional geography in our large area.
- How to design smaller steps and measurable successes.
- Determining day to day actionable items that lead to the big vision.
- Timeline (30/60/90 days).
- How to build influence at state and federal level.
- Controversial issues.
- Change management.
- Information dissemination.
- Who is the audience? (Plant operators / System operators)
- As a Section, need to get to grassroots level; figure out what it is we are not providing now that we need to provide for the future.
 - Workforce development and recruitment is crucial.
 - Subsection leadership training
 - It is not a waste to think about the future or water, whatever the timeframe.
 - Where do we see water in the next 5-10 years?

Leadership Training – what do we want to provide

- Emotional intelligence.
- Interpersonal communications.
- Organization and time management.
- What if CEUs can't be accumulated, will anyone attend? What would be another incentive?
- Conference focuses on engineering and may not be meeting the needs of those who need to move up in other capacities.
- Can the Section sway states on CEU approvals?
- Board must start thinking about and focusing to design a training curriculum that includes vision of the future.
- Any core fundamentals that will support any future initiative.

- Difficulty getting Oregon and Washington on the same page regarding CEUs.

The session was wrapped up with a promise of further discussion the next day. Trustees agreed the day had been worthwhile and they felt more closely connected as a team.

The session was adjourned at 3:30

The meeting was reconvened on Friday, July 21 at 9:00. All attendees from the previous day were present except Pat Dwyer.

President Dan Sleeth outlined the discussion for this section of the meeting.

Goals for this year

- Task ad hoc committee to design a rate study procedure for conference registration rates so there is a basis for setting the rate each year. Nick Belmont will keep this committee moving forward.
- Create a structure for Executive Director performance reviews that is built around the job description and incorporates a formal scoring program as well as a determination of who should be included in the evaluation process.
- Water 2050 – we need to know expectations and, whether or not we agree with the overall direction, the Section needs a long-term vision. We can support but need to know where we are going and address sustainability.
- Work on engaging committees.

Individual Trustee Action Plans

- Consider 30/60/90 day check-ins.
 - Some can't reach out as often as others but action plans may assist committees to be more successful.
- Goal to have each committee's guiding documents link on every committee and subsection webpage.
- Workshop about working with divisions; new members come in and have no guidance about how to run a committee.
- Develop a guide for Trustees - an SOP for being a successful committee liaison.
- Consider having a senior trustee mentor an incoming trustee.
 - Conference is not a good time for that connection, too much happening – consider a check-in 30 days out.

- Dean noted that at the Association level, new directors are invited to spend the year prior to being seated attending all meetings, receiving e-mail communications, etc. Section timing could be adjusted so that voting happens earlier; newly elected Trustees would have more time to acclimate and engage.
- Further discussion about onboarding new Trustees
 - There isn't a direct transfer of committee duties as there is a match-up between Trustee and committee according to individual expertise.
 - Schedule a meeting with a senior Trustee before the first Division meeting.
- The Trustee's role is to produce something tangible with their group during Fall Training.
- There is an expectation of at least one training a year for some committees yet there are no trainings currently on the website.
- Plan for accountability; see what you need to commit to when deciding whether to join.
- Trustee workplan is a good idea, just need to figure out what the structure is.

The Executive Director was tasked with creating a document template for a Trustee workplan as well as an outline for senior Trustee to incoming Trustee mentorship.

Guidelines

- Will make a better and more effective organization.
- Will eliminate some of the problems of Trustees connecting with committees.
- All volunteer leaders should have some autonomy, Trustees do not run everything.
- A highly functioning committee should have encouragement but a struggling committee will need guidance.
- Workplan template shouldn't be overly cumbersome to complete and use. Keep it simple but effective.

Preparing for the Fall Trustee Meeting

2024-2025 Budget Process and Timeline

- Finance Committee submits budget to Executive Committee
- Executive Committee recommends possible changes.

- Document adjusted, edited and submitted to Board of Trustees – any concerns sent to Chair- Elect and Treasurer; document shared with their Divisions
- Final budget to Board at beginning of September for discussion.
- Approval at the Fall Trustee meeting.

Trustee Role During the Training

- Committee Guiding Documents Work Session – Incorporating thoughts on 2050.
- Jude Grounds and Cole Benak will lead a group conversation about 2050 followed by section group breakouts with other breakouts later in the day. All ideas will be captured and reviewed by Trustees.
- Sections have usually been given autonomy by AWWA; AWWA provides information on processes at the national level.
- Conversation at Fall training will try to get participants to think about the future- not specifically targeting 2050, but thinking further out than a year.
- Belmont in charge of subsection officer training; Sleeth will do committee officer training; Trustee meeting on Friday.
- Objective for 2050 discussion – use subsection officers to get the message out about 2050 but also want members to think about the future of water industry.
- Suggested that in the future we provide training for members similar to the training received at this strategic planning session.
 - Consider paying for an extra hotel night so employers will allow attendees to stay another day.
 - Give fun opportunities for teambuilding and developing communications skills.
 - If it becomes ongoing, vice chairs could participate as well.
 - A way of rewarding members who have leadership interest and potential.

Further discussion of the 2050 Initiative.

- Trustees have responsibility to read materials from the national think tank.
- Focus on what we can do as a Section that aligns with 2050. We need to do something that makes sense for our region.
- Critical issues for our region (and nation) are workforce development, forever chemicals, getting funding to help those affected.
- 2050 should stimulate thinking and brainstorming but we can use it to define a more local perspective.
- AWWA is not the only organization that will drive what happens to water in the future.
- Dean will report results of the Fall meeting to AWWA.

- AWWA is looking at regionalized utilities on the basis of watersheds.
- We need to ask our membership what matters to them at the Fall meeting.
- 2050 is a global, not just a national initiative; there will be pivots and directional changes several times over the course of the initiative and in the next few years as others join the conversation and elected officials change.
- Think about longevity instead of bandaids – what do we want to accomplish in the next two years with a focus on long-term sustainability.
- Get on board with technology or be left behind. Need to be talking about Artificial Intelligence at the Section level and how it can be implemented for good as well as what its pitfalls are.

Wrap-up Issues or Questions

Kihs noted that agendas will be out soon and should be helpful to those who have not been to a Fall meeting. He outlined the timeline and process of working with Divisions. Two breakouts with Divisions will address the future of the industry and how the Association can help that and a second work session will be held to work on the document for the website. The existing worksheet designed by Jill Hoyenga will be helpful to review.

Trustees should make sure the committee chairs come to the division meetings and make sure each committee has someone with Google access.

Sleeth noted that Past President Michelle Cheek has expressed interest in being nominated for Treasurer. Since she sits on the Nominating Committee as Past President, she will be recused from the process for vetting candidates and choosing a Treasurer. Sleeth has appointed Alex Mofidi to replace Cheek on the Nominating Committee just for purposes of the Treasurer position.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:00