

By DAVID D. HAYNES  
President of AOJ

In the weeks since our conference in St. Petersburg, I've done a lot of thinking about AOJ's future. While the conference was a success and our partnership with the Poynter Institute has helped to stabilize AOJ, we remain a challenged organization. Our problem is not mainly about money - it's membership. With barely 200 members, we no longer have the volunteer capacity to support programming.

This deficit is especially acute in leadership. We do not have a vice president, and I will leave the post of president on June 30. Unless a successor can be identified in short order, we will need alternatives.

I have concluded that the best course is to merge with another journalism organization. In a recent board meeting, the board agreed to explore this alternative.

I am writing today to ask for your thoughts as members of AOJ. Please let me know at: [dhaynes540@gmail.com](mailto:dhaynes540@gmail.com)

As I see it, we have these options (in no particular order):

- A. Become members of the Society of Professional Journalists:** Under this scenario, AOJ could continue to manage some aspects of its programming such as Minority Writers Seminar and the State Department Briefing as a "community of interest" within SPJ. If we did that, AOJ would have to pay for its own 990s, board insurance and for bookkeeping, among other things. We'd need a budget and financial oversight. AOJ would need to continue as a 501(c) 3, and our board would need to remain in place. Alternatively, AOJ could turnkey everything to SPJ and close the 501(c) 3. We'd still need a "board" to manage the "community" but our costs would be far lower.
- B. Become members of the American Society of News Editors:** ASNE is very interested in partnering with us in a fashion of our design. President Pam Fine suggested a special rate for AOJ, joint annual symposium with ASNE and APME, sessions of our design, a trial partnership or other various arrangements. ASNE First Amendment work and diversity census and training match well with MWS. ASNE would welcome our proposals.
- C. Continue independently:** We could negotiate a new deal with Poynter or another "home base" or set out on our own with an executive director. The current Poynter contract (\$25,000 annually) expires June 30.
- D. Cease programming and disband as a formal organization:** We would need to find a home for Minority Writers Seminar and perhaps make a one-time donation of our unencumbered funds to the MWS endowment to ensure that the endowment remains solid. Former AOJ members could continue to operate AOJ's social media channels and discussion list. We could create our own virtual community but without the overhead of an organization. The Google Group and our core membership would give us a head start.

**The board is committed to ensuring that the Minority Writers Seminar survives.** At our Jan. 12 board meeting, the board voted to forego planning a Symposium for 2016 for now; we do plan to offer the Minority Writers Seminar later in the year.

No other decisions have been made.

On behalf of the board, I am seeking the advice of AOJ members. What option most interests you?

**Please share your ideas by Feb. 19.**

Our goal: To identify a path forward before the spring board meeting, which will likely be in late April or early May.

Please take some time to consider these ideas and let me know what you think.