Guild of Bookworkers

Chapter Chair Discussion

Thursday, April 18, 4:30 PT/5:30 MT/6:30 CT/7:30 ET

Present:

Kate Levy–President

Todd Pattison–Vice President

Jennifer Buchi–Secretary

Charlotte Hayes–Potomac

Jane Mahoney–New York

Marlyn Bonaventure-California

Sephora Bergiste–New England

Holly D’Oench–Rocky Mountain

Trisha Weekes–Rocky Mountain

Valeria Kremser–Delaware Valley

Kristin Balmer–Delaware Valley

**Note:** There was a problem with the Zoom email, so not all chapters received notification of the meeting. **A second meeting will be held on May 2 at 4:30 PT/5:30 MT/6:30 CT/7:30 ET.**

Main Discussion Topics

* Sharing general chapter strategies for engagement
  + **Rocky Mountain:** Chapter has two main centers in Salt Lake City and Denver, but also has folks in Wyoming and south. In the past, Rocky Mountain did a monthly or bi-monthly meeting, which offered a space for people to meet up, and there’s interest in restarting this.
  + **California:** Zoom workshops do well in California, but looking for ways to engage people monthly. Having only a couple of events per year makes it difficult for people to stay engaged. There’s a very limited board in California, and in-person meetings only have a handful of regular attendees.
  + **Delaware Valley:** Lucky because the previous president created a lot of momentum. Chapter offers a combination of online and in-person events. In-person events include bowling, museums, and libraries–not just workshops. Exhibits tend to have participants nationwide, and DV has members from all over the country due to exhibits. Exhibits encourage participation because it’s an opportunity to show your work.
  + **New York:** There’s currently only one board member for New York, and lack of engagement makes chapter management difficult. The last in-person event was pre-covid. New York has the same geographical problems as other large chapters: there’s a disconnect between upstate and NYC. Tried a Zoom workshop for members-only to encourage engagement, but mostly nonmembers showed up. Zoom workshops require a lot of planning work which is difficult for a single board member, and in-person workshops/events are too expensive: it’s hard to find space that doesn’t charge. The Center for Book Arts in NYC allows events, but had little in-person attendance, although online events were better attended. The Legacy Press will also offer events, but it’s difficult financially and with time to broaden their appeal. It’s hard to get people interested in being in the board, and outreach to new members. There was a prior discussion about a “new member package” to attract newbies, but it’s not clear what the package would have included. NY attempted social media groups, but no one wanted to use them. Standards is a good place to meet people but is financially prohibitive. A newsletter is a good idea, but only if there’s enough engagement to get other people in on the project.
  + **New England:** Has common issue of lack of continuity between board members. Current chair is the third in only a couple of years, so didn’t get a chance to see how things ran prior to her tenure. Idea: Newer volunteers in the chapter are working on programming and exhibitions, and want to collaborate with other chapters to host more international guests and/or attract people through bigger events.
  + **Potomac:** Had strong relationships with institutions pre-pandemic. Exhibits are rebuilding now and lucking out. Have members at institutions that can host exhibits. Has good luck using institutional connections (employees or employee friends/family) to get exhibit space.
* Primary challenges for chapters
  + Lack of engagement and volunteers for GBW boards and other functions
    - CA: Current chairs often don’t have anyone in the pipeline to take over at the end of their tenure.
    - CA: Some chapters have only one or two board members. In this situation, it’s difficult to do programming, write a regular newsletter. How do we get people to invest in volunteering? It seems to have gotten worse. People pay dues, but need to volunteer as well.
  + Lack of engagement overall
    - New England: People don’t want to volunteer to do anything, not just be on the board. There’s a tension between newer bookbinders and older/more experienced bookbinders, where no one is leading the newer bookbinders to do things as well as “they used to be.” There are improvements with the handbook and more onboarding, but the issue goes beyond just members of the board. How do newer bookbinders make connections with older bookbinders who already have their own community, without feeling like outsiders? New England chair is reaching out individually to folks in the chapter to try to address disparity, but it’s visible in other bookbinding groups as well, not just in GBW.
    - VP: People who’ve been in the field longer didn’t learn everything on their own, had people to teach and support them, and need to be willing to do that for the next “generation” in terms of experience. In New England, it feels like there’s a gap. Not much of a middle between “new” and “old.”
  + Cost of class space: Many want to do in-person workshops, but difficult to find rentable space
    - Potomac: Local library conference rooms tend to be very generous with space, though it’s not a workshop space. The challenge is, many people who teach workshops want binding equipment, not just tables.
    - New York: Pre-covid, used Center for Book Arts and Talas, but money did not come from events because venues basically took all of it. Want to offer members their money’s worth, but everything is expensive.
  + Technology can be a hurdle: can we match more tech savvy folks with less to get over the hurdle of offering Zoom workshops?
* Geographical chapter structure
  + Todd: Are the arbitrary regions working? Is there another model that could work? Could we use more chapters so the areas aren’t so big? People interact more with the guild at the chapter level than at any other level, so it’s important to drive engagement locally.
    - California: Smaller areas work much better. The CA chapter technically covers all of California, but is based in Southern California. HBC is in San Francisco, and is older and well-established in that area. HBC and the CA chapter are sort of sister organizations and try to work together. In-person chapter events don’t attract Northern California, so Zoom is a good option. **Challenge:** More chapters or sub-chapters means needing more volunteers, and that is already a problem.
    - Subgroups may work? If an event is created with a local focus, people who come to that event from farther away might be a good pool of volunteers for creating subsequent events in their areas.
      * This might be an opportunity to employ the buddy system: Chapters remain centered in urban areas, and are used to help connect people who are further afield.
    - Definite interest in splitting the Rocky Mountain chapter into Colorado and Utah, perhaps could try on a similar “city hub” system to include Wyoming, New Mexico, etc.
    - Rocky Mountain: Do co-chairs work? Both cochairs are new, but planning in CO and UT is totally separate. Having multiple chairs is good for sharing ideas, but actual scheduling takes place individually. There’s also a shared digital exhibit, and some interest in an annual event for both CO and UT. UT side doesn’t get together as frequently as CO. Zoom and online workshops offer good potential for collaboration between two parts of a single chapter.
    - New York: Considered doing studio tours in different parts of the GBW region. The question is, how easy is it to schedule something in a place where people want to meet? Sometimes you have to find people already in an area who want to get involved, and encourage them to do the groundwork. Again, the problem is limited resources of money and volunteers.

Ideas/Strategies for improving engagement

* Workshop/Instructor Resource: Guild could maintain a list of good instructors and what they teach, plus details about length, cost, materials, etc.
  + List of In-person instructors and Zoom instructors
  + List of “Fast friendly free” in person or online quick workshops
  + List of international instructors that chapters could collaborate to bring in for teaching.
  + CHAPTERS: Send list of past workshops and instructors to Todd, who will start compiling master lists for chapter use.
* Increase collaboration between chapters
  + Specifically, chapters could join together to bring international instructors to the guild.
    - Questions arise on how international chapters are paid given the Guild’s tax structure. Do we need a sponsoring/collaborating institution?
  + Exhibits are also opportunities for chapter collaboration.
* Ideas for encouraging more volunteers
  + President: people have trouble finding volunteers and board members, and the only way she’s had success is to cold-call folks and ask them specifically to do things. Has gotten some no’s, but has been able to fill committees this way especially if it’s a finite thing, or a specific event.
  + VP: People tend to find volunteering rewarding, once the initial recruitment is done. One-on-one connections are definitely the way to go.
  + California got excellent folks to join, but they left right when their term was over.
    - We need a clearer expectation that volunteers are expected to help get other folks to take their positions when they leave.
  + Do we know or can we find out why people leave? Maybe a bad experience with a member?
  + Delaware Valley discounted workshops for board volunteers as a perk and a way of saying thank you.
* Chapter Mentor Program/buddy system
  + “Mentor” suggests an uneven dynamic, but creating an opportunity for one-on-one connections between new guild members and more experienced ones, to help new ones “get their feet wet,” be better connected.
  + New York suggested a chapter mentor program–great idea
  + “Buddy system” or “chapter chat” system could help connect people who are near each other, but far from an urban center: Chapters could connect folks in less-served areas of their region. Helps get over the hurdle of city-based activities.