

Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets Board Meeting Minutes December 6, 2022

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM by Cathryn Cofell. Attending were: Jeff Anderson, James Burton, Naomi Cochran, Cathryn Cofell, Dennis Collier, Anneliese Finke, Colleen Frentzel, Michael Gadzik, Ronnie Hess, Joan Johannes, Christina Kubasta, Sandra Lindow, James Roberts, Mary Rowin, Kathleen Serley, Shoshauna Shy, Thom Singleton, Tori Grant Welhouse, Ed Werstein and Kathrine Yets.

Board members decided by consensus to hold one conference per year, rather than two, and to encourage more regional meetings and other programs. There was also consensus that both statewide and regional events be more interactive with workshops, panels, collaborative poems and times set aside for creative writing. Event planners were encouraged to experiment.

The discussion was based on the results of a survey of membership conducted after the fall conference. *Should all or the first few pages of Cathy's survey be appended to the minutes?*

Suggestions on the annual conference included:

- More flexibility in timing, though spring or early summer were preferred to fall.
- Expanding to a full weekend, Friday through Sunday, but having options for partial attendance with a partial fee.
- Limiting roll call to new poets and prize winners, but being open to other opportunities for reading, such as a second open mic or a break-out session for poets who want to read.
- Welcoming first-time attendees by offering buddies or mentors or helping new attendees connect with each other.
- Opportunities for outside activities, and showcasing attractions in the host city.
- Helping attendees find rides or share hotel rooms to reduce their expenses; a private Facebook page for the conference might be a way to do this, or an online message board, like Ideaboardz.com.

Several respondents to the survey expressed concerns about the general membership meeting, possibly reacting to conflict over changes in the constitution and bylaws enacted at the fall meeting. Sandra Lindow suggested the board find ways to make these meetings, required to be held once a year, more interesting and interactive to encourage involvement by members other than officers. Christina Kubasta said reports and other information could be shared outside, rather than during, the business meeting to reduce the time commitment at the conference.

Cathy Cofell said that the board should continue to explore recruiting a volunteer to be our conference planner for conference logistics. One may not be needed until after the 75th annual conference in 2025, since plans for conferences until then are currently underway. A planner with technology skills to help with online offerings would be a bonus.

Regional events should be for the whole membership, not just those in a particular region, and fellowship should be a key component—social gatherings as well as workshops or readings. They might offer a better way to introduce new members to the WFOP rather than a statewide meeting. Fellowship can also be promoted by helping new members to form critique groups. Discussion on regional events included:

- Activities that do not require a hotel stay, to help hold down expenses for participants.
- Increased online programming.
- Partnering with other organizations, such as local arts groups, book festivals and libraries.
- Flexibility as to timing during the year.

Two concerns were also raised:

—The time commitment required of regional vice presidents, though they would be organizing statewide conferences less frequently.

—Expanded regional budgets for booking poets, facilities and other expenses; possible sources: money saved from eliminating one statewide conference each year; charging participants, though benefiting members and reaching out to non-member poets should remain a priority; donations from patrons; and banking money by not having large events every year. Colleen Frentzel noted two other potential sources: the contribution the WFOP is receiving from Richard Swanson and interest on a maturing CD, but it was later noted that the CDs are set aside to pay for contests.

Ronnie Hess noted that the co-presidents and vice president continue to look for volunteers, and reported that two parts of the calendar business manager duties for 2024 had been filled, but not the third.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 PM.