

# ***Belt Media Collaborative***

## ***Board of Directors Meeting – Minutes***

December 14, 2018  
4:00 p.m.

### **Attendees:**

Board Members

*Present:* J.W. Babcock, Dan Crissman, Peter Debelek, Anne Trubek

*Absent:* Amy Eddings Hilan

*Quorum present?* Yes

*Others present:*

Executive Director: Ryan Schnurr

### **I. Call to order (Anne)**

### **II. Reports**

#### **a) Report on magazine programming/initiatives (Ryan)**

- Guiding principle for Executive Director (ED) during the changeover: Where does Belt fit in the national/regional/local conversation? ED believes it should be a place to host discussions about what it's like to live in the Rust Belt/Midwest
- Changes implemented by ED since leadership change:
  - Shift in editorial focus to back to general interest culture rather than only investigative reporting
  - Website redesign, emphasizing categories (Features, Essays, Poetry, Commentary) and reinstating previous logo
  - Biweekly newsletter rebranded as “The Dispatch,” with a separate newsletter for donating members called “Editor’s Notebook”
  - Push to increase diversity of writers (gender, racial, etc.) sitewide
  - Pursued partnerships with other institutions for support and shared content
    - New America Chicago – fulfillment of previous arrangement to produce shared content for both outlets
    - Better Government
    - Magazine for the Lower Midwest
    - Indiana Humanities
    - Scalawag (regional Southern website) – collaboration on Great Migration piece
    - 100 Days in Appalachia
- Challenges faced during the leadership change:

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- Women and persons of color are generally less likely to pitch stories
- Fundraising efforts difficult to balance with editorial duties
- Most successful pieces published since leadership change:
  - “Squirrel Hill Is a Special Place—and It’s Not by Accident” by Hannah Lebovits (10/30/2018)
  - “Preserving Black Artists’ Legacies in Pittsburgh” by Njaimeh Njie (12/3/2018)
  - “Losing Lordstown” by Vince Guerrieri (11/29/2018)
- Other kinds of programming planned in 2019:
  - Podcasts – Potential collaboration with Postindustrial (see New Business)
  - Events – Live readings in Cleveland, Detroit, or Chicago, as have been organized in previous years

### **b) Report on fundraising/campaign (Ryan)**

- NewsMatch 2018 – \$18,000 raised as of 12/14 (\$9,000 from member donations)
- Email campaign responsible for the vast majority of donations
- Social media effective in signing new people up to email list, not effective in securing donations
- Direct mail campaign going out before the end of 2018
- Sharing content with partners cuts costs, thus reducing fundraising needs
  - New America Chicago – Dan Lurie
  - Indiana Humanities - \$7,200 to publish 12 stories
  - Illinois Humanities – events and cross-promotion
- Focuses for 2019
  - Membership – developing a consistent strategy
  - Pursuing new grants and partnerships (NEA?)
  - Major gift initiative (ED to look into hiring part-time consultant to assist)
  - Expanding merchandise for sale on website

### **III. Old business**

- None

### **IV. New business**

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- Change of board chairmanship
  - Tabled for next meeting
- Additional board members
  - ED / Board Members to present suggestions at next meeting
- Postindustrial – new website about the Rust Belt/Midwest launching in 2019
  - Will consist of print magazine, website (paywalled?), and podcast network
  - Business model appears to be for-profit, trying to be “prestige” cultural publication for region (Texas Monthly, etc.)
  - How should Belt Magazine respond?
    - Possible collaboration on podcast or feature
    - ED to set up a call with the founders to discuss, Anne to be on call

### **V. Comments/remarks**

- Pursue capacity building grant from local foundations?
  - Peter to counsel ED based on his experience
- Fact-checking/copyediting help needed for Magazine
  - Publishing side can provide list of potential names

### **VI. Adjournment (Anne)**