

August 5, 2018 Monthly FON Board Meeting

Attendees:

John Baird, John Hutchison, Rabiou YARI, Phyllis Forbes, Dale Downes and Cheryl Turner, Tom Dechert, Amy Wilson, Penni St. Hilaire,

Missing: Tom Corcoran, Seybou Douma, Meredith McGehee, Larry Koff, Steve Bushell,

1. Call to order 7:05 p.m. EDT: John B
2. Quorum [*1] : Cheryl
3. Vote on Board [*2] - John B presented the Slate of members, and the three officers approved the full board list with no discussion. We now have a full board of 11 voting members.

John B thanks everyone for being willing to serve on the Board. He reiterated that we are all volunteers, and we all have good intentions. All of us understand that some people have more time than others and the work can be heavy at times. We all have a lot to offer. We hope that we can encourage and inspire each other. So that we can look back in a few years and be proud of our joint work.

4. Discuss Agenda – Amy added item 19 regarding writing a thank you letter to Senator Cory Booker

5. Approve June 24, 2018 minutes – Penni
Penni is not here, but we will move ahead with approval of minutes
Moved, seconded, approved.

6. Approve July 1, 2018 minutes - Penni (Penni's last official act! Thanks Penni!)
Phyllis did not receive the minutes – Cheryl will get her a copy
Moved, seconded, approved, no discussion

7. Treasurer's Report: Larry (copy of June 2018 working funds attached when agenda was sent out)

Larry is not here. Larry re-sent the available funds report with the agenda. That report indicated that there is a total of \$38,004 funds available.

Phyllis asked if that means that this is the amount of money we could use for projects.

Tom explained that \$38,004 is the amount of money in the bank account. Of that amount, \$7500 is earmarked for Potental Terre and for the Moringa project. There is also \$5000 earmarked for Lightbown. There is about \$19,000 left with no earmark. The only other current commitment for \$2000 for BFR for the next phase of funding. That leaves approximately \$17,000 for other projects, including the two solar projects John H is recommending.

Phyllis noted that we need a clearer report that states what funds are committed and what is available for new projects

Dale agreed that we need a better treasurer's report, to explain what the commitments are.

Amy added that Phyllis Shelton the pro bono CPA who will be helping Larry should be able to get us to a better reporting structure

Dale agreed to call Larry to verify report

8. Motion: accept CPA Phyllis Shelton's pro bono offer [*3]: Larry (tried to get on the call but was not able to get the technology to work.)

John B reported that Larry called around to try to get info (NPCA, and others) on resources for helping us with booking on projects. He found Phyllis Shelton who is willing to give us seven hours of her time to set up a better bookkeeping system.

If there is no objection, we can move forward to accept her offer (no Vote needed).

Dale wants to check with Larry to make sure he likes and can use the new Quickbooks system. If he is not comfortable with Quickbooks, Dale is happy to help out. Can Larry take this on? We don't want to have to bring in someone on a regular basis to sort out our financial reporting and create an ongoing expense.

Amy added that Larry inherited books that were not designed to track projects. We need this support because the current system can't produce the reports we need to manage projects. Once set up, it should be easy to use and maintain. Once set up, we can use it easily. Larry won't be able to modify the new system, but he should be able to use it without any trouble. Phyllis Shelton set the accounting system up for the Pacific RPCV group, which manages projects in the field, and their system is working well. After she gets us set up, she should provide a briefing for the whole Board, Amy added that all of the Board is responsible for our finances, not only the Treasurer. The Treasurer tracks finances, but we are all responsible (same for secretary/ minutes)

We all agree to move forward with Phyllis' help. Larry will get in touch with her. JB will also talk to her and report back to the Board about what we can expect.

NOTE: John H added that Larry is available and waiting for a call. John B was not able to add a telephone call to the Skype call. Phyllis suggested a switch to Zoom.

9. Membership (currently 812 in our contacts list): John B and Amy

John B: As former membership chair, John will get the membership up to date, and exported from Access to Excel. Then he will pass to Amy. He also said that with the new Quickbooks financial system, the accounting system should be able to issue receipts more easily, which will make it a lot easier for whoever is managing the Membership records. Big time saver.

Amy agrees.

10. CEX: Need editor. Tom D had offered but John B asked him to continue on projects. He can't do both.

Amy will help with CEX, especially the next issue. She is hoping to recruit Dale Downs, make the newsletter more topical, getting more content from what he is posting on Facebook.

John H sent a message to Bill Miles to see if he might contribute periodically. He knows Niger, is a gifted writer, has contributed in the past, and we would like to get additional contributions. We agreed that this is not a board action, and want to continue to get good content from lots of members and non-members.

[Sec note: Does this mean that Amy is the CEX editor? For now? For the next issue?]

11. CEX next issue ... when? Mid-September? Annual Fundraising Appeal letter 12/1/18?

John B: The newsletter needs to come out in advance of the end of year fundraiser. We can use email for other events and news items leading up to the end of year appeal for funds.

Amy thinks we can get the Next CEX together by late Sept or early Oct. We need to think about whether the appeal letter is really necessary.

John B: CEX Editor is not an elected position, Amy and Dale and JB will help with next CEX. We will need to track whether an end of year appeal makes a big difference

Cheryl: We might consider a lovely postcard for less cost and more impact.

12. FON Facebook Page: Dale

Dale reports that he has been posting about five times a week, and response has been good. He will put together a report soon on FB analytics.

13. Need a webmaster -- Steve Bushell has resigned

Amy reported that in the recent survey there might be someone who could do it. There was someone in England who wanted to get involved, but they couldn't serve on the Board because of the time difference. JB and Amy will go thru survey and see what they can find. We would like to find someone younger and hopefully be better able to use technology.

John B also noted that Steve was also assistant treasurer. We will need someone else to be a back-up for Larry to handle pay pal, writing checks. Everyone agrees.

14. Need someone to host Skype Board meeting calls and/or research and use ZOOM

John B: It is hard to host the Skype and preside at the meeting as well.

Phyllis offered to schedule the meeting on Zoom for next time. Zoom is a no-host platform and allows people to join by phone or computer. It should be easier for Board members to join at the same time. It also allows for video (better than Skype)

Cheryl: Do we want to consolidate roles?

Amy – The President sets agenda. Let's try Zoom next time

15. Niger Diaspora: Yari

John B: What is going on with Nigeriens living in the US (and elsewhere)?

Yari: For Aug 3, Independence Day, communities in New York organized an event with Burkina Faso and Ivory coast (10pm to 4 am!!). Otherwise, there is not a lot going on. The Nigerien Ambassador at the UN usually organizes events, but we haven't heard about anything, and don't know why. Yari heard one of the embassy guys sent a flyer. The first First Lady will be organizing a forum in September in Niger for the diaspora on development in Niger (in Niamey), especially if they are interested in investing in Niger.

- There is flooding all over the country right now, Agadez, Maradi, Zinder, Niamey. Some people have contacted him to see if Friends of Niger can help. Thousands of people are affected.
- There is a woman's NGO for victims of Fistula, visiting Niamey that really needs our support. He sent them the link for grant application and will be working with her to put together a proposal for the Projects committee

John B – We would love a report on the September event as well as more info about the flooding.

16. CONUSA: Douma

Yari has not talked to Douma but plans to talk to him. IN the future they will talk together before a Board meeting and give a joint report with a few talking points

17. Cheryl's visit to Niger starting August 13: Cheryl, John B [*4]

Cheryl: I am going for work and will be meeting with some of the international NGOs that the Ambassador listed in his email. Her trip will also be trying to identify good local NGOs as implementing partners. These organizations might be sources of potential collaboration with FON. She will also meet with Sue Rosenfeld to see if she is interested in being an on the ground representative. She is also following up on John B's email to Eric Whitaker. What is "The Ask" for that meeting

John B – mostly to make sure he knows about FON, the kind of projects we fund, potential collaboration. We might be able to fund some projects that come to the Ambassadors fund that they cannot, for some reason. Ambassador fund can't fund some things if there are too many donors. If there are good projects that they can't fund, they can pass to us. Also, we want to make sure that if we send funds that the funds can get there safely, and are not going to nefarious purposes.

18 – Email addresses – Cheryl

Cheryl – It might be helpful to have some role-based email addresses, so that people taking on different jobs can take over a gmail account and see how issues have been dealt with in the past, see old copies of documents, etc.

John B – we need to talk to Steve Bushell. There is an email address for Projects, and there might be one for the President as well. John will try to get the history and find out who is custodian of the addresses. How many addresses do we want? One for each office and Projects?

Cheryl – Maybe also Membership. We have to think about what we need, and what makes sense

John B – do we want one for each officer plus projects.

Amy – There are addresses available through our website. This is where the President and Projects email address came from.

19. Board Retreat: Amy and Phyllis F

Amy: Lots of people agreed on two days; there was good consensus on topics. Phyllis proposed Boston as a location, as it is easier to travel to. We might be able to rent a house so a lot of people could stay there. People generally liked the Fall. Amy will send out a Doodle Poll for specific dates and see what people can actually do. If we are talking about renting houses, people will need to make a commitment.

What about Vermont?

Phyllis: There are more of us than she realized, so it would be hard for one person to host. We could rent a nice house for less in Northern Burlington.

Amy/John B: Committee will continue to refine. Amy, John B and Phyllis, Outside of city is more focused, less expensive, and we can carpool.

20. Senator Booker. –

Amy: Senator Booker and a few others were in Niger, and after the visit followed up and was able to get some dissidents released. Amy's friend Mourou sent info from what was in the news in Niger and about Senator Booker's trip in March. It would be good to send him a thank you letter, letting him know that we are Americans who are paying attention, to what is happening in Niger, and we can continue to support any other info he might need. Maybe we should send to the other Senators on the trip as well. Amy will draft the letter for John's signature.

Amy: There is an RPCV who works for Senator Leahy, so we could follow up with her as well. We want to cultivate our friends and members. Also potentially put something in the CEX about the Booker visit and follow up.

21. Projects Committee: Phyllis F

Phyllis: She has spent a lot of time in the last month or two reading through all the documents on Projects. On the positive side, the Application guidelines are great. However, how to do job of Project committee is not quite so clear. Some things to clarify include:

- What is the purpose of the Projects (and the organization); Some potential mission/objectives might include:
 - o Create opportunities for Nigerien people,
 - o what exactly do we want to get out of the projects
- What is our process? Not clear, needs to be more simple and track clearly against the application guidelines
- As we talked about earlier, we are not doing a good job of tracking how much we are giving and when. The project reports and emails don't match up. Total of projects pending is hard to follow, since some are in CFA, and some in USD, so we need better financial accounting.

- Phyllis has talked with every member of the Projects committee, and is impressed with people, but the committee doesn't get along, partly because of unclear process and objectives.
- We need to have simple statement of priorities and process, which should help to iron out difficulties, - be better able to work together
- Also, this is a lot of work! The management of projects needs to be more efficient, or no one will have the time to manage these projects. IF we can't streamline, she will not be able to coordinate this committee.
- We should also look at geography. If you put the projects on a map, you see that a lot are in the same areas. Do we want to diversify more?
- **Need to be able to say that the Project is 1) consistent with FON goals, 2) FON has the money and 3) the project will be feasible to manage.**

John B – Are you saying we need to have a Project budget? We have never had that before. What do you need from others on the board?

Tom was surprised at what PF said. There is a process, He thinks the process is clear. Tom and Phyllis will discuss offline.

Penni – As a board member, she appreciates what the committee has done. Projects seem to come in bits and pieces to Board members She would like to see a more organized approach, recommended projects from the committee come to the Board for approval. She really appreciated what Tom and Amy are doing.

John B really appreciated Tom's 4-page report, with project summaries. These summaries are very helpful for the board. This summary report include the 2 projects that John H recommended. Let's end the discussion lets have the committee meet together before going to the full board. Next meeting they can present their new process to the board.

Phyllis: if for some reason a project is urgent, we will send an email, for a Board vote. Otherwise, we will talk at the next meeting.

John H wanted the Board to vote on 2 Solar electricity proposals submitted by Mohamed Harou, both under \$1000, He made the case that these proposals would be an important contribution for minimal funds.

"I move that the board of FON vote to support funding of rural electrification through solar power. Proposals were submitted by Mohammed Harou in Dakoro Region"

Cheryl - Is there a recommendation from the Projects Committee?

Tom – These are the first 2 on pending list.

Penni – There is no recommendation one way or another. The project committee should meet and bring it to the Board.

John B: The committee will meet and have a recommendation for the next meeting. The project recommendation doesn't necessarily have to wait til the next meeting – maybe we can approve by email.

22. Proposed: Next Meeting, Sunday, September 16, 2018 at 7 p.m. EDT

23. Adjourned: 8:36 pm

24. Follow-up items

- a) Cheryl - send July 1 minutes to Phyllis
- b) Projects committee will meet, agree on a process and make some recommendations on funding for the next Board meeting in September.
- c) Dale agreed to call Larry to verify treasurers report
- d) Larry will follow up with Phyllis Shelton about help with accounting, and John B will also talk to her to see if she will brief the Board on her work as well.
- e) John B will pass Membership database to Amy once exported to Excel.
- f) Need to identify Webmaster (from Survey Responses), and Assistant treasurer to fill in Steve Bushell's roles. [no clear responsibility on this item]
- g) Phyllis will set up Zoom call for next Board meeting
- h) John B will talk to Steve Bushell about the existing FON email addresses, and can we create more, access passwords to those that exist?
- i) Amy will send a Doodle poll to schedule the Board Retreat.
- j) Amy will draft a letter for Senator Booker
- k) Tom will share Projects process document with Phyllis. Projects committee will review the process and review pending projects. They will make funding recommendations at the next Board meeting.

Footnotes:

[*1] Three of the four officers would constitute a quorum.

[*2] Because our inscrutable bylaws contain the following phrases (following in blue) the case could be made that we currently have just four voting members -- the four officers elected at the last meeting. As an overabundance of caution let's have these four officers appoint and elect the following seven (7) to the Board right now -- it should take less than a minute, and then we'll have for sure a Board of 11 voting members: Dale Downes, Seybou Douma, Rabiou Yari, John Hutchison, Tom Corcoran, Amy Wilson, Penni St. Hilaire. On September 2, 2018 we can change the bylaws to allow a total of 15 Board members, and then we can add Meredith. *3.2: Appointed members shall serve until the next scheduled election when each shall then stand for election as any other previously elected Board member must stand for re-election.* AND 3.5 Based on the number of Board members standing for election, the same number of candidates receiving the most votes shall be elected to the Board.

[*3] With the help of for FON Board member Gabriella Maertens, Larry Koff has discovered Phyllis Shelton who helped set up the accounting system for the Oregon Friends Group (a RPCV organization) and has served as its treasurer. John B has talked with her -- she seems to be the right person for us, and she has offered to spend 7 hours (about \$500 worth) pro bono to help us set up the accounting system we need with QuickBooks. Related: Through correspondence with Ambassador Eric Whitaker in Niamey we have some advice and options about supporting project and groups in Niger. The Ambassador's email is attached.

[*4] Courtesy visit to the Ambassador by Cheryl? What could she discuss with the Ambassador on behalf of FON?