

September 27, 2013

To: The PNBA Board of Directors
From: Thom Chambliss

Re: Action Plan bimonthly update

Dear Board Members:

According to the Governance Policies revised by the Board on January 12, 2009, item 2.2a requires that “[The Executive Director will submit the following required periodic reports:] An Executive Director’s Report outlining the progress toward achieving the Association’s ends and any significant shortcomings, presented at each regularly-scheduled board meeting.” Here below is my Report, based on the Mission & Ends enumerated in Section 1 of the Governance Policies.

Again this year, we are not faced with huge money problems nor a dire need to cut the budget. That’s the good news. The not-so-great-news is that we are somewhat stagnant, and I don’t just mean in the “even is the new up” sense. Our bookstore memberships continue to decline as more stores close, the number of booksellers able to attend the fall shows continues to decline, as the remaining stores cut back staff, and my efforts to increase library participation have failed to make a serious impact on library membership.

The Board has formally recognized the holiday catalog and the fall shows as our two most important member benefits, and the two areas most worthy of staff attention. This year we received proposals to feature more than 160 authors at the fall show. We had 90 spots to offer authors last year, and with a little juggling I have raised that to 95 spots at this year’s show, counting each of the signing spots as a “featured” spot as well. Only one other regional association offers that many authors at their shows, and that is the Southern Independent Booksellers Association (SIBA), which says they are featuring “more than 100 authors.” (Half of their educational sessions are panels of authors talking about their new books.) New England, for instance, is promoting their show as featuring “more than fifty authors.” Apparently, more publishers feel like they can get a better “bang for the buck” by sending authors to the PNBA shows than they can by sending them almost anywhere else. And yet, our author memberships are almost non-existent.

It is time for us to re-arrange our thinking and come up with programs that will encourage author membership, and the best way to do that is for PNBA to offer our member authors more value. I plan to work with staff in the next two months to develop a new initiative to accomplish that. We will work with regional author groups (like the Seattle7Writers and the Oregon Author Tour group) to design programs that will benefit their members, and especially up-and-coming authors, that will encourage them to join PNBA and participate more actively in our programs and on NWBL. Success in this area could significantly improve our membership and advertising income, and benefit our stores with an author population that is better prepared to deal with our member stores.

I expect to start the discussion of this proposal at the October Board meeting and to flesh out the details at the 2014 Board Retreat, if the Board approves the concept.

Here is my report on the progress we have made in our specific on-going ends:

1.a) Provide marketing programs via [promotional opportunities](#)

The 2013 holiday catalog is going to press on Monday, October 7, during the fall show. The first shipments (to AK) will begin on about the 10th. The catalog is close to meeting our

expectations, if a few dollars short of projected income. We projected 120 titles, and are so far at about 123, but with a few more discounts required to attract some of those titles. The title selection is very cool, with NO Amazon titles on the list. I ran a quick check on line to see how the other regional book associations are doing with their catalogs, and found ONE that has more titles than ours, New England, with 138 titles. Northern California has 116, SCIBA 101, MidWest 96, MPIBA 94, GLIBA 91, NAIBA 91, SIBA 88, and MPIBA 87. Brian's work to score 123 GOOD titles is amazing, considering those others.

1.b) Provide marketing programs via public blog

Northwest Book Lovers (NWBL), our public site established to bring attention, more customer traffic, and increased sales to our member stores is slowly doing better, as it did last year. Brian found more publishers interested in placing ads on the site this year, usually as part of packages, and so more income has been realized than last year, and we still expect the amount to increase before the end of the year. When Jamie quit, I hired Tegan Tigani to coordinate the writing and scheduling for NWBL, but she has at least two other jobs and has not been able to spend as much time with the blog as Jamie did. Hence, our expenses for the blog have decreased.

My proposal to increase our membership value to authors in 2014, if accepted by the Board, may mean that we more directly feature member authors in 2014, which will require more steady work on the site, which will increase our costs again. However, I expect that the increase in expense would follow an increase in income (from membership and ads), and that the income increase will more than compensate for the increased costs.

1.c) Provide marketing programs via bestseller lists

Larry's weekly lists, sent via email to all of our members each Wednesday, are the best looking and most potentially helpful to our members of all of the regional book associations'. It takes Larry about ninety minutes each week to produce and distribute the bestseller list. Most of the other regional associations merely forward to their members the list produced by the ABA. If we ever reach the point where we need to cut programs again, I will suggest that cutting the detailed, photo-heavy version of the Bestseller Lists be eliminated. It is nice to offer it, as long as we can afford it.

1.d) Provide marketing programs via book awards

The promotion of the 2013 Book Awards went fairly smoothly. We have no plans to change the program for 2014. If any Board members, especially those of you who are in stores daily, would like to see changes to this program, please share those ideas with the rest of the Board, and make a proposal at the Board meeting.

1.e) Provide marketing programs via literacy organizations

Our only effort in this area in 2013 is our Matching Literacy Grant program, which both last year and this has seen a dramatic decline in store participation. So far this year, we have received only three Matching Lit Grant apps, and all three are from Board members. It is my SENSE (I have not done a formal poll) that fewer bookstores are donating, and when they do, they donate less money; and that more of our bookstores have cut staff and fewer stores have the staff time to put into either making donations or dealing with even the minimal bookwork that we require to take advantage of the Matching Literacy Grant program. We publicized the program in Footnotes three times, and sent a separate email about it to all of our stores, and permanently post info about the program on our web site. The Board may want to consider dropping or completely changing the program in your discussions at the next Retreat.

1.f) Provide marketing programs via public book events

Portland's Wordstock is the only regional public book show in which any of our members still participate, those two being Powells and Broadway Books. There are much

smaller, local shows, one in Kirkland, WA, one in eastern Oregon, and the other in the Spokane area, but our donating to them would not provide any quantifiable benefit to more than one or two of our member stores, and I would not recommend that we contribute to any such group unless it provides a benefit to at least a dozen of our members. We have ceased donating to public book events, until a reasonable number of our member stores ask us to do so. (There is a rumor that Wordstock may “take the year off” in 2014. If that is true, it may actually spell the death of Wordstock. We should know more by the time of the Retreat.)

2.a) Encourage interactions with the book industry via tradeshows

I lowered my estimate of our room block needs again this year, and again this year, we have exceeded our room block at the host hotel. Considering that we would have a few more people staying at the host hotel on Saturday night this year, because of how many I hoped to see sign up for the Saturday Paz education session, I guessed that we would take 70 rooms on Saturday night. As of Sept 18, we had taken 88 rooms. I estimated that our pick up on Sunday night would be 156 rooms, and by the 18th we had taken 162, and I KNOW that more have been reserved since then. Basically, the hotel will be full with our attendees. Maybe their bringing in the Stumpdown Coffee franchise has made a difference!

PNBA is the only regional book association that actively encourages other industry professionals to attend our shows, by providing the librarians, authors and small press publishers all with their own free educational sessions, and we allow them entrance to the entire show. Unfortunately, those increases have been considerably smaller than I had originally hoped.

Publishers proposed to feature more than 160 authors at this year’s show, and I added five more spots than last year (including the signing spots) and we will feature 95 authors at this show. That is twice as many authors as are featured at the New England regional show, the Mountains and Plains show, or the Northern California show, all of which had shows larger than ours ten years ago. Their shows are now literally one-half our size. I believe that the “success” of our shows is due to two things: (1) our keeping two days of exhibits (all the others have cut back to one day), and (2) our finding so many new ways to feature authors. We should work harder to add even more opportunities for authors, as that could be a profitable way to maintain our success.

To that end, I am proposing that we devise some new membership alternatives for our author members, that we aggressively market those opportunities to potential member authors (emphasizing “newer” authors who need special consideration to make their names and books accessible), and that we turn as many of those opportunities toward NWBL, to provide new (free) content and lots of new site promotion by those same authors. If the Board approves the concept of this proposal, staff will develop a range of opportunities which we will begin promoting in early 2014 and ask the Board to more thoroughly discuss and approve the program at the 2014 Retreat.

2.b) Encourage interactions with the book industry via staff outreach and membership recruitment

I plan to reach out to author groups in OR and WA in the coming year, to get their sense of what PNBA might do to encourage their more active participation in our Association. This will help inform our new author outreach, and help staff refine exactly what we do for authors and how we might do it more efficiently, effectively, and profitably.

2.c) Encourage interactions with the book industry via networking

Most of our networking efforts are now concentrated at our shows, Northwest Book Lovers, and Footnotes. I have no plans to change that emphasis in 2014, but would love to hear your ideas about how we might improve them on those “platforms.”

2.d) Encourage interactions with the book industry via website

Larry made some excellent improvements to the tradeshow page this year, adding separate links to specific show events, and to author information about their appearances, and the expectations for them at the show. We have already begun devising more such improvements for next year, and plan to expand the “permanent” postings that we can provide, which will improve author interest in attending the shows and improve their understanding of their roles at the shows, and will explicitly improve their understanding of how to deal with our member stores, which is the long-term goal of all of our efforts.

2.e) Encourage interactions with the book industry via handbook

The handbook is rumbling along as usual, under Larry’s capable management. We receive about one call a month, asking for the access code to the Handbook, from members who accidentally deleted their bookmark for the site, or who just discovered that they never recorded the updated link. We have not received a complaint about the Handbook for several years, though, which I take to mean that our members are not only used to it being available only on-line, but also that they actually LIKE it more, because it is so regularly updated.

3.a) Produce educational opportunities via educational programs

We reduced the number of sessions for authors and publishers at this show, because the hotel’s remodel reduced the number of breakout rooms available. The Board approved our producing a full-day session before the fall show called “Planning Your Stores’s Next Chapter,” with Donna Paz and Mark Kaufman. So far, twenty-four booksellers have paid to attend this session, and three others will attend as “exemplars.” I consider PNBA lucky that Paz & Associates chose us as one of the few places in the country where they would offer this session. I am very pleased with that turn-out.

3.b) Produce educational opportunities via regular communication

Footnotes continues to be our primary means of regular communication. Northwest Book Lovers is expanding that communication, with info about issues that are also of interest to the public. NWBL in fact gives us a communication tool that is updated daily, but requires the bookseller to seek us out. Our Facebook and Twitter followers continue to increase, but we need to find a better way to encourage people to go directly to NWBL. I am hoping that an effort to encourage more author participation will be done in such a way as to force the authors to provide links to NWBL from their websites, to re-print (with links) articles on NWBL about them to their fans, and will begin to show an overall increase in site traffic in 2014. With the Board’s permission, of course.

3.c) Produce educational opportunities via scholarships

We have discontinued the straight give-away scholarship programs, and turned almost entirely to providing scholarships to attend the shows to booksellers and librarians who produce educational sessions. I plan to expand those scholarships in 2014, by, for instance, rebuilding the Education Committee, with the Board’s approval, so that it is structured more like the Awards Committee, with a chair who is responsible for pulling all of the education sessions together in exchange for a full show scholarship, and Committee members who are each responsible for producing a defined number of educational sessions at the show, in exchange for a partial scholarship to the show. Again, I would like the approval of the Board to go in this direction, and, if the Board approves, I will start devising and working with a new structure in early 2014, well before next year’s show.

3.d) Produce educational opportunities via BookPros

This program has been mothballed, due to minimal demand, and to save costs. Office staff has received no complaints about the demise of the program, nor any requests for the kind of help that the program used to offer.

4.a) Support public literacy via literacy organizations

Our Matching Literacy Grant program is fading, as I mentioned above in my comments about Marketing via literacy organizations (section 1.e). I recommend that the Board add this to your agenda for the 2014 Retreat, and that we consider re-developing the entire concept, with the understanding that most of our stores do not have the money, time or staff to provide their own grants to literacy groups.

4.b) Support public literacy via libraries

Our primary program for such support is the Michael Pritiken Memorial Rural Library program, which is being coordinated by ex-bookseller and PNBA Board member Colin Rea, who is the director of the Fern Ridge Public Library, west of Eugene. Last year the donated books were sent to the Craig Public Library in Craig, AK. This year, Colin solicited bookstores in Montana to find a worthy recipient library, but no bookstores responded to his pleas. He then switched to our Idaho bookstore members, and received a nomination from Vanderford's Books and Office Supplies, to benefit the Wallace Public Library in Wallace, ID, a town of 887 people. The Wallace Public Library agreed to send a few people to the show to help Colin inventory and box the donated books and to drive them back to Wallace after the show. The library receives only \$500 from the town per year for new book purchases, so the PNBA donation should be an immense boost to their collection this year.

4.c) Support public literacy via schools

Again, direct donations to schools have been suspended until we have more money coming into the Association than we are spending. ONE of the three Matching Literacy Grant requests will provide books to a local school foundation, which will benefit several schools in the district, rather than just one.

5.a) Promote Free Speech via advocacy

This is an on-going activity, with no new programs to discuss at this time.

5.b) Promote Free Speech via monitoring of censorship issues

We continue to report free speech issues of interest to our members, both in Footnotes and sometimes in NWBL.