

ATTACHMENT B: Bylaws Amendments Q&A

What is the process for amending SPJ bylaws at convention?

There will be a business session at the SPJ21 conference during which the proposed bylaw amendments will be debated and voted upon by the verified chapter and regional delegates. This year the meeting will be held onsite at the convention in New Orleans and virtually via the online conference platform. In other words, delegates can participate either in-person or virtually. Conference attendance is not a requirement for delegates to vote.

Proposed bylaw amendments may be amended by the convention, provided that (1) such convention amendment is approved by two-thirds of delegates voting and (2) the convention amendment does not change or add to the general subject matter of the proposed bylaw amendment.

Non-delegates can watch the session but only delegates are allowed to debate and vote.

What are the changes being considered this year?

Please refer the 2021 Proposed Bylaws Amendments document (attachment A) for reference.

The first proposal is considered housekeeping and corrects old language. One relates to the candidate nomination deadline. One relates to the board process for selecting Fellows of the Society. One would address the possibility of an elected officer leaving a vacancy before the end of a term. And one would change SPJ's approach to the governance of its communities. Please read the Bylaws Committee report and the proposed amendments, available at <https://www.spj.org/proposedamendments.asp>, to understand the proposals more fully.

How did these proposals reach voting delegates at the convention?

The Bylaws Committee proposed these amendments, some of them at the request of another national committee. In June, after the SPJ board deadlocked on a motion to submit to delegates at SPJ21, the boards of 17 SPJ chapters voted to send the proposed amendments to the convention for deliberation (the bylaws require 10 chapter boards do this).

Proposal A: Housekeeping amendments

Why is this amendment being proposed now?

These changes are considered "housekeeping" and correct terms, language, and grammar from prior decisions.

Proposal B: Campus Chapter Advisors

Why is this amendment being proposed now?

These changes are meant to bring the national bylaws and the model chapter bylaws into alignment by indicating that campus chapter advisors are chosen, instead of elected. This is the common practice for campus organizations.

Proposal C: Nominations deadline

What is the current deadline for candidates to declare that they are running for SPJ office?

The bylaws permit nomination of candidates for national offices, elected directors and regional coordinators until five days before the convention begins. That deadline has existed since 2012, the year SPJ opened voting to all members.

Why is this amendment being proposed now?

The SPJ Board appointed a task force to review election and campaign policies. Among other recommendations, the task force suggested changing the nominations deadline to six weeks before the convention, concluding that allowing candidates to jump into the race at the last minute is unfair to other candidates and to voters. The task force considered a wide range of potential deadlines ranging from the current five days to six months before the election. For guidance it looked at election timelines other media associations use. For example, Online News Association (ONA) candidates must declare about a month before voting begins, National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) candidates must declare about 20 days in advance, and National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) candidates must declare about two months before voting begins. The SPJ board discussed the task force recommendations and approved most of them in April, but moving the nominations deadline required a bylaws change. You can see the elections committee's report [here](#) and watch the board meeting [here](#).

Proposal D: Fellows of the Society

Why is this amendment being proposed now?

Each year the board selects distinguished journalists to be Fellows of the Society. In addition to receiving the award, Fellows agree to speak on the Society's behalf at one or more event(s). The bylaws say the board can name three Fellows annually, that new Fellows who are not SPJ members will be initiated into the Society, and that SPJ will waive the Fellow's dues for one year. Recently, the board has suspended the bylaws to surpass the three-fellow limit, and adopted a policy that each Fellow will be made a life member of SPJ. To bring the bylaws into conformity with practice, the Awards and Honors Committee requested this amendment.

Proposal E: Society officers

Why is this amendment being proposed now?

Events in 2019 highlighted a deficiency in the bylaws regarding board vacancies. The bylaws provide for filling a vacancy in the presidency, the secretary/treasurer position, and among regional coordinators. But the board cannot replace the president-elect between elections. This amendment would permit the board to appoint a replacement, makes clear that there must be an election for both top offices in the next election cycle, and makes clear that the appointee cannot automatically become president. It would also change the position's title from president-elect to vice president, starting with the next election.

Proposal F: SPJ communities

What are SPJ communities?

Communities are like chapters in that they are grassroots groups of SPJ members who come together socially and to learn their craft. The main difference is that chapters are geographic entities and communities are built around professional interest. There are two large, very active communities — the Freelance and International communities, and one smaller one — Community Journalism. The memberships of the Freelance and International communities are as large as those of SPJ's largest

chapters in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. The Freelance Community has about 300 members, including 200 of whom are members of chapters as well. The SPJ strategic plan calls for creating three more communities with an as-yet to be determined focus. You can read more here [link to communities page].

Why is this amendment being proposed now?

The Bylaws Committee began discussing creation of communities a decade ago, and the Freelance and International communities started about eight years ago. The committee submitted the current proposed amendments and report in early April for inclusion in the packet of materials for the April board meeting, and they have been available to the public since then. The board discussed this amendment and other amendments in June, and deadlocked on advancing them to the delegates for a vote.

How do chapters and communities relate to each other?

Chapters and Communities have similar goals in programming. Most chapters put on programming of interest to members, including FOIA, ethics and how to cover developing news. Communities do similar programs, but they are more apt to focus on topics of greater interest in their subject areas. For example, the Freelance Community frequently does programs on the business of freelancing, pitching stories and protecting their work. The International Community has weekly programs about covering issues in developing countries, personal safety, and press freedom outside the U.S.

The SPJ bylaws go into detail about how chapters are created, how they operate, how the Society oversees them, and what must be done when they go dormant or are terminated. The bylaws say almost nothing about communities. The amendments would put communities on the same footing as chapters — communities would be chartered by the national board, they would have bylaws and elected officers, they would be subject to Society oversight, and they would have a say in SPJ governance through their delegates to the national convention.

How would giving communities delegates impact governance?

Each SPJ chapter gets one delegate to the convention for every 50 chapter members or portion thereof. In addition, unaffiliated members are represented by regional delegates (also one for every 50 members in a region). Currently, communities do not have delegates. If that changed, community members would have representation at the annual convention and be allowed to vote on future bylaws amendments.

What about members who belong to a chapter and a community?

Currently, SPJ members are allowed to join multiple chapters, but they are counted only once for purposes of allocating delegates, i.e. a person who works in the L.A. Times Washington Bureau may be a member of the L.A. and D.C. Pro chapters, but s/he is counted in the membership of only one of those chapters. This proposal would apply the same rules to community members. A member who belongs to both a community and a chapter would be counted for one of them when the time comes to allocate delegates.