

# Participating Organization Council

## Meeting Minutes 10.05.2021

### Attending

Kathleen Fitzpatrick (MSU)  
Meredith Hale (ARLIS/NA)  
Paula Krebs (MLA)  
Lynda Park (ASEEES)  
Bonnie Russell (MSU)  
Pauline Saliga (SAH)  
Mike Thicke (MSU)

### Regrets

Peter Berkery (AUPresses)  
Christopher Long (MSU)

### Announcements

#### [Humanities Commons Receives \\$971,000 Mellon Grant to Support Its Expansion](#)

- The Mellon grant will go toward the 1.5 million match for the NEH grant
- Positions to be hired: sysadmin, identity management, community development, user engagement

### Discussion

#### Council Bylaws

The Commons bylaws describe in broad outline the composition and function of this council, but we do not have a specific document defining how this council operates. The council discussed items that should be included in a bylaws/principles document geared specifically for the council.

- Should it have a mission statement?
- Information about the size and composition of the council
- Can it spell out the interactions between the council and the paid staff of the Commons?
- What authority does this body have in decision making?

KF will draft a set of bylaws and circulate to the council for discussion.

## Schedule for Meetings

The Commons bylaws indicate that the council is to meet four times per year, with one session conducted in person, in conjunction with a mutually agreeable meeting (like ACLS). This decision was made before COVID, and it looks increasingly as though the landscape of in-person meetings is going to be very different now. As a result, the proposal was made to eliminate the in-person meeting, and scale back to three virtual meetings per year, with regular business as follows.

- February: appointing new members to advisory groups; budget updates; strategic planning
- May: approving the proposed budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1; approving any proposed changes to the rate sheet; strategic planning
- October: receiving and reviewing annual report; budget updates

The proposal was accepted, with a request to have the meetings early in each month.

## Budget Updates

- KF receives regular financial updates from the university and has worked to create a set of coherent financial reports suitable for the wider audience of stakeholders.
- These reports are intended to communicate the stability of the project and to solicit advice on how to dedicate reserves in the future.
- The council will approve any changes in the rate sheet (to make sure we remain solvent), based on the reporting and expenditures as needed.

## Advisory Group Appointments

A proposed slate for the initial technical and user advisory groups was presented to the council for discussion. A strong desire was raised by council members that the diversity of representation within these groups be increased. Council members suggested potential additions, and provisionally accepted the slate of members for both boards, but asked to see an updated slate once the staff completes recruiting. Staff were also encouraged to ensure that future calls are disseminated to all of the participating organizations, and suggestions were made for enhancing newsletter uptake.

## Development Updates

Mike Thicke, Lead Developer  
Bonnie Russell, Project Manager

### Technical Debt Remediation

Currently, our main development focus at Humanities Commons is “technical debt remediation.” Over the years HC has fallen behind on maintaining our software---both internally and

externally. We have been working to rectify this over the last few months, and this will be our main development focus in the near term.

Our specific areas of focus are:

- Plugin & Theme upgrades: HC uses nearly 200 plugins and themes. Upgrading these requires significant testing and bug fixing to ensure that the Commons society sites and user sites are not disrupted. We anticipate rolling out the next round of updates in the next two weeks, which includes significant updates to Commons In A Box, BuddyPress, and associated plugins. We should be up-to-date with most of our themes and plugins within the next two months.
- WordPress upgrades: Next up are upgrades to WordPress. HC is currently using WordPress 5.6. WordPress 5.7 includes a significant update to jQuery that will likely require updating our code to be compatible with the new version.
- Site Cull & Theme Audit: We are currently culling unused and abandoned user sites. This is a prelude to the theme audit, where we will be reviewing our current theme usage with the aim of moving users away from outdated themes and eventually expanding the themes that are available to users.

## User Self-Service

There are a number of routine tasks for which users need to contact support. These include adding a new email address to their profile, adding a Humanities Commons login, and deleting an account. Users can also get stuck in the enrollment procedure and need to contact support for help. We are working to allow users to complete more of these tasks themselves and to more easily recover from enrollment issues on their own.

## Disciplinary Expansion

Humanities Commons is expanding its focus to include social science- and stem-focused commonses. We are currently working to expand the available subject areas for the CORE repository using FAST. We will next begin working on implementing disciplinary commonses.

## Main Theme Refresh and Replacement

The main Humanities Commons site, and other society sites, currently use a custom theme based on BuddyBoss. This theme is starting to show its age. Over the next few months we plan to refresh this theme to deal with some of its major accessibility, usability, and aesthetic issues. After that we will begin work on replacing BuddyBoss with a modern, block-based WordPress theme.