

HumanistsMN Annual Retreat  
July 2023

**Attendees:** Ellie Haylund (president), Mitch Thompson (vice president), Stephanie Schwinn (secretary), John Walker (treasurer), Nick Haylund, Audrey Kingstrom, Abigail Jackson, Suzanne Perry, Jerry Smith, Seth Engman

**Call to order:** Ellie Haylund

**Facilitator:** Jerry Smith

The meeting began with a review of HMN's mission and purposes, its business model, and the SWOT analysis conducted earlier in the year.

**Infrastructure.** We reviewed and evaluated the following systems and resources used as part of HMN's everyday activities:

- Our website appears to be in good shape, and no major problems were identified with Membership Works, Stripe, or Quick Books.
- Nick gave a demonstration of Slack, explaining how it could facilitate communication among Board members and potentially with the membership at-large. Advantages: Less email, faster communications, ease in keeping track of multiple discussions. Challenges: Annual cost of almost \$100 per user. As a non-profit, HMN may be eligible for cost reduction. A "free" option has limited features and only keeps messages for 90 days. Discord is another alternative. Action: The Board decided to try the free Slack option. Nick created a HumanistsMN Slack channel. Action: Ellie will see if AHA would provide financial support for a paid Slack account. Action: Ellie and John will explore Discord as an alternative.
- Social media. No concerns were identified regarding our activities on MeetUp, Facebook, Instagram, or Youtube. Our members-only MeetUp account continues to be dormant. We discussed developing a social media policy to promote consistency of use and messaging. Suzanne recently set up a Threads account as an eventual replacement for our presence on Twitter.
- Technical support. The major concern was with the streaming of live events. We discussed acquiring a streaming tablet which would be portable and user-friendly. On the other hand, its cost might not be justified. Our access to equipment could be affected by the change in Mitch's job status. Action: John will train Mitch so he can assist with streaming events.
- Finance. We discussed consolidating HMN's financial activities with Huntington Bank to improve cost and convenience. We agreed that the Treasurer should be authorized to purchase CDs whenever HMN's cash reserves exceed a specified amount. John and Jerry will continue to serve on the Finance Team. Action: Mitch volunteered to serve on the Finance Team.

- **Accounting and Budgeting:** We discussed accounting for donations and the need for monthly reconciliations of bank statements. Action: The Finance Team will develop and implement a budgetary process that will produce a budget for Board approval and review by the membership before the start of each fiscal year.

**Membership.** HMN has approximately 380 members. The recently reestablished Membership Team, consisting of Audrey and Cindy Erickson, includes a hospitality group which, among other things, will welcome people to our events. Cindy has been studying Membership Works, finding that it is fairly limited in its features and not particularly user friendly or intuitive. We discussed looking for a different system. Action: Abigail volunteered to serve on the Membership Team. Action: Ellie will look into other membership management systems.

We also discussed whether we should have another membership drive or focus on retaining existing members. Approximately 600 nonmembers currently receive the HMN newsletter and there are thousands of Meetup members who are not HMN members. We decided to focus on retention and not have another membership drive this year. Action: To promote retention, an HMN officer--Mitch volunteered—will make a personal written appeal to individuals whose membership has lapsed.

**Programming.** Owing considerably to Audrey's leadership, HMN delivers a variety of programs, these being a recognized strength of the organization. Focused on our monthly "community gatherings," the Program Team is developing a 2023-24 schedule that will include "name" speakers addressing important topics; it is also hoping to offer events in innovative new formats. Agreeing that none of our existing programs need to be dropped or substantially revised, we focused on identifying potential new offerings, such as social activities that could be held in a variety of places in and outside the Twin Cities metro area. For instance, Cindy Erickson has hosted dining events in the West metro. Various people have expressed interest in presenting Ted Talks as part of Secular Saturday. Action: Stephanie will explore opportunities for social activities in the south metro. Action: Stephanie will explore educational sponsorship opportunities—for instance, robotics teams, debate or STEM competitions--targeting under-resourced schools in the metro area.

**Church-State Separation.** In view of the media attention and burst of new memberships generated earlier this year by our billboards, white Christian Nationalism's assault on American democracy is both a threat to our country and an opportunity for HMN. Accordingly, we discussed how we might address this threat in ways that increase HMN's visibility and impact. In addition to again holding our annual Day of Reason event, we considered possible new activities: Sponsoring a "Humanists Day on the Hill" earlier in the legislative session; meeting with the secular government caucus prior to the session; in the future and in collaboration with other concerned parties, hosting a conference on the topic of church-state separation; partnering with secular organizations in Greater Minnesota to sponsor billboards outside the Twin Cities metro; soliciting invitations to provide humanist "invocations" at legislative sessions; and producing and distributing lawn signs that align humanism with the fight against Christian nationalism. Action: Ellie will look into the lawn sign options.

**Investments.** A major motivator of HMN’s strategic planning activities is the need to effectively deploy our accumulated financial resources in service to the organization and its mission. Rather than making decisions with regard to HMN’s existing “portfolio” of investments—scholarships, Open Arms, Camp Quest--we agreed on the need to develop criteria for evaluating these and other investment opportunities. We also agreed on the need to consult with major donors as regards their preferred distribution of funds. We will continue to seek out investment opportunities, having a special interest in educational initiatives (other than scholarships) as this is a major HMN “purpose” that is relatively unaddressed by our current activities. Action: The Board, or a designated committee, will develop criteria for evaluating proposed investments.

We took up a special case requiring immediate Board action: Eleven HMN members have initiated the “HumanistsMN Ukraine Sponsorship Project” which seeks to provide \$15,000 to help a Ukrainian family of three move to the United States. The project initiators have asked HMN to donate \$3000 to help kick off their fundraising drive. After considerable discussion, a motion to donate \$1000 was made by Mitch, seconded by Ellie, and approved by the Board.

**Fundraising.** Even though we continue to have more financial resources than productive ways of employing them, we recognize the need to expand and improve our fundraising efforts. In addition to soliciting general donations more effectively, we would like to increase targeted donations (as for scholarships) by developing a portfolio of investments that appeal to potential donors. Finally, in view of the fact that many HMN members are financially well-off and aging, we hope to develop means of attracting bequests. Action: The Board, or a designated committee, will develop marketing and other programs to promote fundraising via general and targeted donations as well as bequests.

**Other Uses of Funds.** Investments are only one way of employing our financial resources. We discussed two other applications: hiring staff and purchasing a building. The building option was not viewed favorably for various reasons, notably Minnesota Atheist’s experience, our congenial relationship with the First Unitarian Society, and the magnitude of the required investment. On the other hand, the staffing option received considerable support, especially from Audrey. Discussion centered on hiring a part time executive director, as an employee or an independent contractor. In addition to relieving volunteers of excessive workload, having a paid executive director would “professionalize” the organization, creating more continuity and increasing its “status.” Acknowledging that HMN may not yet have the financial wherewithal to pursue this option, and that recruiting candidates is challenging in its own right, we have set the hiring of a part-time executive director as a goal we’d like to keep in mind and pursue over the next several years.

**Staffing.** In addition to the possibility of hiring an executive director, HMN faces other staffing issues. The term limits in our bylaws will create substantial Board turnover during the next several years, involving members who are key contributors to the organization. We hope to be able to keep departing Board members as active HMN participants. This connects to another issue, that of motivating HMN members who are not on the Board to contribute their time and

efforts to the organization. While we've been able to do this in the past, any plans to expand our activities require greater contributions of this kind. Thus, we considered various means of recruiting and rewarding volunteers in service to HMN. Recruiting might be accomplished through a "volunteer fair" held during one of our Secular Saturday events, with various HMN teams staffing tables where attendees could explore volunteer opportunities within that part of the organization. Rewards and recognitions for volunteers might include hosting a volunteer appreciation dinner and highlighting volunteers' contributions through a monthly feature in our newsletter. Action: The Board, or a designated committee, will develop means of recruiting and rewarding volunteers who provide valuable services to the organization.