

Rationale and History of the Annual Business Meeting Committee

In March, the Steering Council (STC) reviewed how the Annual Business Meeting (ABM) held in early 2011 had gone. Since the last two ABM's were significantly contentious, the Council decided to create an ad hoc advisory committee to look into alternative procedures for the Annual Meeting that would balance the need for meeting efficiency with the desire to promote harmony in the community. Members of the community were invited to participate by email and by announcements at Sangha, and eight Sangha volunteers* participated in one or more of the three meetings of the ABM committee.

The ABM committee concluded that, given the size of the Sangha, there were too many decisions that required Sangha-wide approval to consider well in one annual business meeting. So we decided to propose that all community decision-making be vested in the three Councils, with the following three exceptions: budget; volunteer sign-up for councils and projects; and significant changes in Sangha structure.

In order to ensure that this change did not disenfranchise Sangha members who wanted input into particular Sangha decisions, we created a structure that we hoped would maximize the opportunity for all sangha members to be informed about and have input into matters being considered by each Council.

With most of the decision-making moved to the Councils, we suggest below a redesign of the ABM (renamed the Annual Meeting)

- to incorporate contemporary meeting processes and roles to promote efficiency and engagement.
- to have reports and information-sharing on all Sangha activities.
- to have a significant focus on community-building through celebratory activities and mindfulness practice.

Proposal of the Annual Business Meeting Committee

1. Change the name from Annual Business Meeting to Annual Meeting, to reflect our suggestion (below) that its purpose be changed.
2. Community decision-making will be delegated to the Councils except for budget, volunteer sign-up for councils and projects, and significant changes in Sangha structure, which will still be decided at the Annual Meeting. The roles and responsibilities of the councils will not change.
3. Councils will provide greater opportunity for community input at their meetings, by publicizing agendas in advance and opening their meetings to any community member who wishes to attend.
4. If a Sangha member strongly disagrees with a decision made at an earlier Council meeting, the Council will reconsider the decision at a later meeting at which they can be present to express their concerns.

5. The Annual Meeting will be a celebratory and practice-oriented meeting, with more reporting than decision-making, that is designed to nurture community. The following agenda items and roles are recommended:

Agenda items:

- a. *tightly facilitated reports from committees and projects*
Each committee and project will distribute prior to the meeting a detailed written report of their activities in the previous year. At the meeting, each council or project will have time to make a very short presentation of the highlights of their report with one flip chart sheet as reference, but are encouraged to try to keep their reports to two minutes, followed by a short question/answer period. A council/project member (preferably the convener or chairperson, if there is one) will stand by the flip chart to answer further questions during the later part of the meeting in which people are signing up for community roles
- b. *presentation and approval of budget*
- c. *sign-up for roles supporting the Sangha*
The councils and other opportunities to support the Sangha will be described followed by the opportunity to sign up for councils and other roles in the community.
- d. *celebratory functions*
An opportunity to celebrate our achievements and appreciate those who have served the community.
- e. *a significant practice-enriching and community-building activity*

Roles and Process for decision-making:

- a. *decision process facilitator*
The person filling this role should be (i) an experienced and skilled facilitator, (ii) either the President or someone chosen by them, (iii) intimately familiar with the Sangha, (iv) resilient, and (v) able to field issues out of left field.
- b. *a "keeper of the container" aka "vibes watcher"*
The keeper will invite the bell periodically to provide space for participants to be quiet/breathe/regain perspective. They could also provide process comments and/or suggestions, if they choose.
- c. *a timekeeper* to ensure that no one speaker dominates the discussion.
- d. *use of gradients of agreements* in "straw votes" to improve the quality of our decisions and the community's satisfaction with these decisions, by (i) giving us a deeper understanding of the differences in the room, (ii) seeking modifications of the proposal that would allow everyone present to be comfortable with its provisions; and (iii) avoiding voting if possible.

6. The foregoing changes in the nature of the Annual Meeting, and the delegation of most decision-making to the Councils, should be brought to the Sangha for approval at a last regular Business meeting in the old format (in January or February, 2012). At this meeting, the Sangha will consider this proposal and any other decisions brought before the whole Sangha but will incorporate aspects of the agenda, roles, and process described above, when possible.
7. Information should be distributed before the meeting detailing these proposals and the reasons behind them. The reasons we discussed included:
 - a. councils meet more often
 - b. councils are small enough to make decisions effectively
 - c. council membership is open to all
 - d. there are 3 councils, and 27 council seats, providing opportunity for over 20 people to be involved in council decisions
 - e. in addition, proposal #3 makes it easier for non-council members to have input on specific issues
8. If approved, these recommendations go into effect immediately and, after one year, the ABM will convene as the Annual Meeting as proposed here.

The ABM Committee recognizes that the proposal represents a significant change from how SnowFlower Sangha has historically conducted its decision-making and communication activities. Where those activities continue to serve the community well, we have preserved them. In other areas, the Sangha's growth has prompted us to recommend changes. In short, the proposal demonstrates, yet again, the law of impermanence. We ask Sangha members to read and reflect on the proposal, contact any of the ABM Committee members if you have questions, attend the 2012 ABM to discuss it and, if it is approved, treat the ensuing year as a practice opportunity for discerning the degree to which the changes serve their intended purposes.

* Anne Forbes, Ed Jacobson, Don Katz, Cheri Maples, Karuna Namenwirth, Micha Namenwirth, Jim Roseberry, Janet Zimmerman