Telecommunities Canada

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
2023

Zoom conference
Dec. 4
1-2 EST

Attendees: Garth Graham, Marita Moll, Kathryne Carruthers, Chris Cope, Adrian Schmidt, Ivan White, James Van Leeuwen, Tracey Axelsson, Mildred Weiss, Clarice Leader, Fred Campbell

Agenda:

1 Approval of minutes of the 2021-2022 AGM

Marita apologized for not following up on action items such as special meetings which were suggested in the previous meeting. These can still be done if the desire still exists. She suggests that the occasional reminder prompt would not be out of order.

Motion: That the minutes of the 2021-2022 AGM be approved as circulated
moved: Clarice Leader
seconded: Fred Campbell
Motion carried

2 Financial Report

Chris Cope presented the annual financial statement and reported that we haven't had any money coming in and $8.25 going out in bank charges. We are also annual charged $20 for non-activity. To avoid this in the future, Marita and Chris both donated $10 through the donation button on the website. It was easy with both paypal and credit card. It is hoped that others might follow suit. Please let Chris know if you do this so he can move any paypal donations into the bank. They will sit there until he does this.

Final balance is $4,890. Marita noted that donating $20 actually amounts to $40 as we avoid the $20 deduction.

Tracey Axelson asked if we could use Canada Helps for donations or if direct transfer to bank was possible. Katherine Carruthers clarified that Canada Helps was only for charitable organizations.

Chris noted that although there was a $5.00 fee for a paper statement he needed that to keep the TC account on his radar. Chris will check to see if there is anything automatic that can be set up so the Paypal donations go directly to the bank.

Motion: That the financial report be accepted
moved: Tracey Axelson
seconded: James Van Leeuwan
Motion carried unanimously

3 Appointment of auditor

Chris Cope suggested that limited activity on the account means that there is really nothing to audit. He recommended that we forego an audit again this year. However, he noted that if we ever wanted to apply for a grant, government or otherwise, an audited statement is usually necessary and sometimes two years worth of audited statements. James Van Leeuwan suggested that, should that happen, just presenting the bank statements themselves should get us around that. Kathryn Carruthers suggested that, should anyone know a retired accountant who would do this pro bono, it is sometimes worthwhile, for example, if one wanted to apply for charitable status eventually. James Van Leeuwan suggested that volunteer capacity among retired accountants is probably overtaxed.

Motion: That the need for an audit be waived
moved: James Van Leeuwan
seconded: Clarice Leader
Motion carried unanimously

4 President's report

Text of report has been circulated. Much of the activity has been at the international level. TC statement to the Global Digital Compact which members put together is on the TC website and very much reflects our concerns about the internet as a global public good. We will be organizing a similiar process to respond to request for input into the WSIS+20 process. TC was involved in the Canadian response to the WSIS process in 2024-25 through participation at a meeting of stakeholders organized by the then Foreign Affairs Department through the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

Another important activity for us has been involvement in Schools of Internet Governance which sometimes take place as preludes to an ICANN meeting. I did participate in one of these in Washington in June 2023 and was able to get a member of the National Capital Freenet on one of the panels to talk about NCF's activities on providing connectivity to social, community and co-op housing projects.

Adrian Schmidt was elected to the secretariat position in NARALO – North American Regional At Large Organization. TC is an important, even a founding member of this organization. So thanks to Adrian Schmidt for taking this on and keeping TC in some of

the leadership positions.

Discussion: Adrian expresses thanks for the support to get him into that position. Garth Graham noted that after the WSIS+20 session in Hamburg which he attended remotely, he embarked on a project to renew and rearticulate his concerns that nation states may try to reintervene in internet governance issues and degree to which civil society and not for profit organizations are involved in the WSIS+20 process is being overtaken by public private partnerships in terms of action taken in what is called digital tranformation as we move to a digital future. It seems clear that community networks are nowhere to be seen in the process. No emphasis on community driven initiatives in the entire WSIS process. James Van Leeuwan also provided a link to a paper which addresses the same type of issues, but from the ground up. The problem is – how do communities initiatives work together effectively. Essentially, there is no compelling idea in a business model around which community initiatives can actually collaborate. Automobile associations present a model that could be helpful. Look at the history of automobile associations and it is clear that the parallels with the digital transformation, on the infrastructure, applications and capacity building side quite striking . Some helpful lessons to be learned – new technology, new infrastructure, and the need for new governance models as well as the need to help users put the technology to the best possible use for themselves. Need to have a longer discussion on this. We need to have a longer discussion on this and it is imperative that we fill out the WSIS questionnaire.

Welcome Peter Frampton and Joel Templeton. Joel is a new member and has helped set up ISOC Winnipeg.

Motion: That the President's report be received
moved: Garth Graham
seconded: Chris Cope
Motion carried unanimously

5   Election of directors

Following is a slate of potential directors for 2024, all of whom have agreed to be on this list.

Clarice Leader (Man)
Chris Cope (Ont)
Garth Graham (BC)
James Van Leeuwen (AB)
Marita Moll (Ont)
Tracey Axelsson (BC)
Kathryn Carruthers (Que)
Ivan White (Quebec)

In addition, Fred Campbell is nominated to join the list. He received the request too late to reply by the deadline.

Motion: that Fred Campbell (Atlantic) be added to the list
moved: Marita Moll
seconded: Clarice Leader
Motion carried unanimously

Motion: That the following slate of directors be approved for the year 2024
moved: Chris Cope
seconded: Kathryn Carruthers
Motion carried unanimously

6 Member reports

Fred Campbell: Currently pursuing a PhD at Memorial University Grenfell campus in Transdisciplinary Sustainability Studies. The program requires working with communities and I have worked with oer 60 rural communities in Newfoundland for almost four decades. My program focusses on six waves of community media projects since 1979 and what happened, both to the communications processes (which have stopped) and the groups themselves (which disappeared). Have also been reintroduced to community education practice, particularly critical theory. Now I am thinking what is happening is often caused by single individuals in bureaucracy. I still have Rykuga, registered as a provincial non-profit - a social enterprise in Newfoundland. Have also just registered a Canada-wide not for profit for ethical journalism. Studies have rekindled my interest in global issues and I am remembering the days of global learning networks. We are talking about internet governance and other important things, and somehow, maybe it is the disappearance of groups like the Office of Learning Technologies, we seem to be missing global community these days. Last December, I presented to the international association of media researchers.This year I joined the Canadian Association for the study of Adult Education and presented at the annual meeting at OISE inToronto. My presentation ended up focussing on the decades long Newfoundland resettlement program.

James Van Leeuwan: Building on where Fred was going and what is implicit in what he is saying is that we don't have any kind of coherent strategy for realizing the full potential of the digital transformation everywhere for everybody's benefit. A book Technological Revolutions and Financial Capital helps understand the dynamics of technological revolutions and the cycle that they go through – when the innovation emerges, in this case mass produced integrated circuits (circa 1971), private capital drove it. But there comes a point where returns diminish and private capital is looking for something new, the next cycle. At the point government or public interest, even co-ops can step in, and they now say how do we make it available, accessible, affordable so it can be used in everyone's benefit. So far we haven't really reached that point. Private capital is still getting big returns on the current wave of technological communications innovations but it is slowing down and creating the opportunity for public interest to

seize the reigns and start governing how technologies are going to be implemented and for whose benefit. In my context, in rural network development, the reemergence of co-ops, they are actually existing co-ops. There is a great deal of sympathy on the part of the government to leverage the coops to help drive the deployment of optical fibre connectivity on an open access utility model. No actual strategy yet driving things but is starting to bubble from the bottom up and creating the opportunity for senior governments, at least provincial and ultimately federal, to get behind these public interest focussed strategies and initiatives that help to level the playing field and provide far more people with access to the technologies, applications and everything else. No strategies at the moment but the timing is emerging.

Garth Graham: James indicated that private capital was the basis of innovation but Telecommunities Canada story points to a different pattern in the emergence of internet use by ordinary people in Canada because it was the Freenets that introduced e-mail and internet accounts to Canadians. It came from civil society and then, in the small towns where the Freenets were set up small entrepreneurial local persons saw that you could make money out of the internet and they set themselves up as internet service providers. At the top of that there were about 600-700 of them across Canada by about year 3 at which point the telcos realized that the internet was going to replace them and bought out most of the local ISPs. But at the beginning the innovation occurred at the community level. The government never interfered in the public interest. All of the national discussions of policy issues led to a market based approach to telecommunications and the dominance of the prime carriers which is still the case. There is an interesting movement going on in parallel to all this in terms of the localization of internet use and that is digital transformation of municipalities and there is a huge push in that but in many cases it is public private partnerships and the actual citizens are left out of the discussions of how those projects are being formed even though municipalities are beginning to realize that, in terms of digital autonomy, they need to own the loop have access to the data that is driving the change in all the delivery of municipal systems, especially in the face of climate change. So this is not the same pattern as what James has just described.

Chris Cope: Reporting for Ottawa and Eastern Ontario region, there has been a lot of activity by the carriers to bring fibre to the region. Within the next 3-5 years just about all residents in Ottawa will have access to some sort of fibre except that it may not be accessible or affordable and it may not be available to resellers like the NCF. NCF Executive Director Shelley Robinson has been working with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) to offer a variety of interventions to CRTC as they go through this process but CRTC did give a decision not long ago about what carriers had to do in terms of sharing their fibre networks but the decision that was made is not affordable and so nobody, including some of the smaller commercial carriers, can afford be involved and resell that, unlike what they used to do with DSL. Meanwhile carriers,

particularly Bell in our neighbourhood, are gradually eliminating DSL networks as they themselves get fibre customers. So NCF is losing potential members because we can't provide them with hi-speed service. And so we are moving them where possible to cable. We have about 3000 hi-speed customers in total. We have about 5000 members in total and some of there are members for membership sake, to have an e-mail address, whether they use Freenet for connectivity or not. But we have been decreasing in numbers and that is worrisome. Our work as an advocate on behalf of the smaller carriers has been fairly strong and quite effective but we have not been winning that battle, neither has anyone else.. Meanwhile, the major carriers have been gobbling up all the little guys there are almost none left. even Techsavvy has said it is now for sale. The NCF is one of the declining small groups that are DSL resellers or cable resellers.We are doing as much as we can do on educational aspects, moving from connectivity to safe usage. But our major project at the moment is a project likely to lauch this spring. It is a partnership with ottawa ommunity housing and Le Hiboo networks which is a fibre network owned by Ottawa hydo to work We are working with those two partners and with some grant money coming from CIRA. We will be bringing fibre to one of the public housing high rises in the city, connect all the tenants in the building and the put a transmitter on the roof that will broadcast wi-fi signal all the other low rise public housing buildings around it. It won't be free but it will be very very affordable. We will heavily wi-fi all of the community parts of these buildings so anyone in those areas can use the system for free. Our 5 year plan says we are going to connect 10,000 persons.

Tracy Axelsson: On VCN, thanks to Chris, we now use Fibrenetics as opposed to paying for a lot of connectivity through Telus. Fibrenetics lets us scale up and down, depending on usage. It is still free – people pay if they want to. We don't do after them. With respect to VCN, good, fast and cheap is not possible. We have to pick two and fast is not in the cards for VCN. Young people are just accustomed to a higher level of service and VCN is not in a position to provide that. Currently our office is still in the downtown east side but it is no longer open to the public for safely reasons. VCN is going to other organisations like seniors centers and offering help desk and training in those facilities. We are currently engaged in strategic planning to see where we will be in the future. Our services are grant driven and fee for service driven, it is sustainable. We use the money to support anyone who wants access to the internet. But it is hard to know where we are going and if we are fulfilling our mission.

Re: auditing – there is such a thing as "notice to reader" which is much less expensive and acceptable to federal government for grants.

Joel Templeton: The Internet society, Manitoba Chapter is 2 years old now. The idea was to have a single voice and work with and support each other as much as possible. We are the third ISOC chapter in Canada after ISOC Canada and ISOC Quebec. We have two

major projects going on right now. One is our urban strategy in north end of Winnipeg which is a low income neighbourhood and the largest population of off-reserve indigenous people in Canada. A large majority of the rest of the area is newcomers to the country and they have the same problems with connectivity that all other low income urban areas have so we are working on building a low cost, no cost community network. We have a computer give away going on through Computers for Schools Manitoba, digital literacy training through Tech Manitoba and we are starting to build the kind of service desk supports that you have in a community network. So this is very much in its infancy. It is part of a research project going on with the University of Winnipeg so what we are trying to do is experiment as much as we can and share all of that knowledge as openly as we can, with anyone who is interested. So the whole project is open source.

We also just started a new project with Brandon University. Brandon has a rural development institute that has been around for a long time.. They look at economic development in the rural environment in Manitoba and obviously connectivity has a huge role in that. We have a couple of undergrad students who are working with us part time in the spring and full time in the summer. The intent with that is that will have a podcast element to it both for the knowledge mobilization of the research findings and also integrated into the research itself, which is fairly new in the academic world. We are still trying to navigate getting through ethics approvals, etc. I know that there is lots of information in this forums so don't be surprised if I reach out to you. What we ultimately want to to is be able to tell the stories, good bad and ugly, of community projects that have succeded and failed and look at what supports that need to be in place at the local, provincial and national levels. Ultimately the research project will be the first step in an advocacy project and policy process over the next couple of years.

Peter Frampton: In the last number of years LEF has been focussing on housing instead of connectivity. Although connectivity will come into play once we get to the detailed plans. What might be of interest to this group is that we have a number of vice presidents now, and one of them is concerned with "community and place making". We consider the internet a part of that place making. We are doing a lot of work to try and see if we can build a site that does not only promote our programs but is a place where people can lead with their own expertise. On another topic, there is a small group emerging under the banner of "decolonizing data". This is an examination of the necessity of data, the harm it can do, and try to do some analysis with community living and walking in a way that ensures its ownership by community. Focus is centered on black and indigenous knowledges. It is very early days but will be interesting to see where that goes. More information is available on their website: Decolonizing data institute (decolonizingdatainstitute.ca)

Mildred Weiss: I am working with Adrian on NARALO. I worked many years in the

education sector so many of the things you are talking about are very familiar to me – especially in indigenous schools North and Central Alberta and access to internet in the small schools. There are many problems there.

Clarice Leader: Currently involved with a not-for- profit that provides support to people with intellectual disabilities especially getting them using the internet though co-vid. This is a unique program that it doesn't follow the same guidelines as those for people in group homes. Everyone in this program has their own home and we create a support network of family and friends that help them with decision making. With the internet and tools such as zoom, they have been really able to become part of the community – especially partnering with the Manitoba Theatre Association and artists, and engaging in of theatre and art projects.

Move to accept member reports as information
Moved by James Van Leeuwan
Seconded by Clarice Leader
Motion carried

7 Any other business

8 Adjournment

Motion that the meeting be adjourned
Moved: Clarice Leader
Seconded: Tracey Axelsson
Motion carried