

2020 Vancouver Poetry House - Annual General Meeting

Sunday, July 19, 2020

IN attendance:

Board: Amanda Eagleson, Holden Wall, Frankie McGee, Leslie Stark

Mitcholos Touchie, Johnny Trinh, Sean Mcgarragle, Jano Klimas, Sho Wiley, Sam Peters, Joseph Dandurand, Carol Shillibeer, Johnny MacRae, Daniyah Shamni

Colleen Brown-Only in order to provide the arts administrator's statement. Opt-out of voting

Regrets:

Randy Jacobs, Hal Hart, Tessa Bourgignon, Tawahum Justin Bige, Christine Bissonette, Andrew Sutherland, Kyle Hawke, Rabbit Richards, Matt Miller, Leia Herrera, Yes the Poet, Nadia Landman, minhnhon nguyen, Aoife Riach, Brunella Battista, Anjalica Solomon, Rudi Leibik, Static Jam, Kaelyn Elfert, Fernando Raguero, Adrian Yue, Ron Wizinsky, Thom Evans, Bonnie Buchart, Glorielle Panoaniban, Sarah-Audrey Mome, Joseph Collier, Nicholas Parlato, Mika Pierre, Romeo Villanueva, Juli Talerico, Gabriel Ordonez, Milly Berlin, Melina Peters, Dan Viragh, Santiago Urena, Wala Zaidah, Kathleen Tonnesen, Nico Rayne, Melissa Swann, Tempo Sabatier, Tina Do, Kalia Attal, Cassia Johnson, Zainab Alwarid, Emily Hilton, Matt Bryant

Motions:

Motion to approve the Agenda (with the addition of "New Business") made by Frankie. Leslie seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously (this motion was made in chat the rest were by ballot).

Motion to approve the 2019 AGM minutes. Made by Sho. Seconded by Amanda. 12 members vote Yes, 0 members vote No, 2 members Abstain. Motion Carried

Motion to approve the 2019 EGM addendum to the minutes. Made by Sho. Seconded by Amanda. 13 members vote Yes, 0 members vote No, 1 member Abstain. Motion carried.

Motion that the probationary period for new directors be removed and struck down, and will be reconsidered if recommended by an anti-oppression auditor and put to a community vote. 5 members vote Yes, 4 members vote No, 5 members Abstain.

Motion to amend the policy manual's process for board conflict such that the process must be documented, including a formal complaint, which would lead to the occurrence of an investigation, the results of which would be used to determine the board's response, whether it be a request for resignation, a suspension, an expulsion, or no disciplinary action whatsoever. 7 members vote Yes. 4 members vote No, 3 members Abstain.

Motion to formally remove the entire current iteration of the board (Holden, Frankie, Leslie, and Amanda) from their seats on the board. 1 member votes Yes, 7 members vote No, 6 members Abstain.

Board Nominations:

Jano Klimas--Declined
John McRae--Declined
Johnny Trinh--Declined
Mitcholos Touchie--Declined
Sho Wiley--Declined

Re-Election of Amanda Eagleson to the board-- 8 Votes Yes. 1 Vote No. 1 Vote No. Amanda is re-elected to the board.

Meeting Called to Order: 14:10 (2:10 pm)

Holden: We want to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on unceded land, regardless of where we are in our homes right now. I'm on the unceded Musqueam, Skxwú7mesh, Tsleil-Waututh land and all VPH events take place on these lands. Please feel free to pop in the chat to acknowledge the lands you are on. It is important to know the history of the land we're on and what violent and colonial events happened that brought non-indigenous people to this land and to keep this in mind.

Brief introductions for those who may be unfamiliar with the current board make-up:

- Holden is the current President
- Frankie is the current Vice President
- Amanda is the current secretary
- Leslie (briefly dropped off call) but is the current treasurer

Joseph Dandurand gives Welcome:

While not sure where you all are but ask that everyone have a good mind and good heart and it should all go smoothly. I'm honored to be here. And Thank you all again for coming to this meeting.

Holden asks: Joseph forfeits opening poem

Holden Outlines Process:

- In order to try and ensure everyone has a voice and is heard in the space there is a loose two minute recommendation for speaking time. Once you go over three minutes I will let you know (if it takes more time fine this is just to try to make sure people are aware of the amount of time they are speaking). You are of course free to continue to make your point with the exception of hate speech and targeted attacks.
- Frankie is co-chairing to try and maintain speaking order: in the chat, you can use an asterisk to indicate you want to speak (*), DR for Direct Response to let people know you want to respond to something said, and three plus signs (+++) to indicate agreement to a point you don't necessarily want to add to.
- Motions will be noted
- Go onto a Virtual ballot which is anonymous (board will not be able to see who voted which way)
- Will be presented as 2 ballots
 - One will be board elections
 - The Second will contain all other motions
- As of now time set for 20 minute voting period to be set aside (hopefully this is enough)
- Holden will screen share results
- If there is a need for support or a problem let Holden know and will try and assist
- Holden will be building ballot as we go so if looking in weird directions this is why (still will be paying attention)

Frankie Briefly Outlines Agenda.

- Holden makes the point that due to work commitments Colleen will be arriving for the specified half an hour so depending on how fast or slow we go through agenda some flexibility on that point may be required.
- Frankie Adds a section for New Business to the Agenda.
- Frankie Motion to Approve Agenda. Leslie seconds the motion. The motion is approved unanimously in chat.

Amanda had posted the 2019 EGM minutes with the requested addendum and the 2019 AGM minutes in the chat. She advised that there were access issues with the AGM Minutes. Amanda changing sharing function for AGM Minutes while EGM (with requested addendum) being read.

- She makes Motion to Approve EGM addendum. Amanda seconded. Ballot created for this and votes are a 13 member Yes vote with 1 abstaining. Motion carried.

Holden initially makes a motion to approve the 2019 AGM minutes (with spelling mistake corrected) and Amanda seconded. She indicates in chat that Holden is main chair (so should not make the motion).

- She makes Motion to Approve the 2019 AGM minutes (with the correction in spelling). Amanda Seconded. Ballot created for this and votes are a 12 member Yes votes, 0 members vote No, 2 members Abstain. Motion carried.

Holden makes Presidents' report:

- Begin by extending gratitude to the staff who have worked with VPH this year. Sam Peters as SlamMaster, Tessa Bourignon as WordPlay Coordinator, Colleen Brown as Arts Administrator, Joseph Dandurand as Artistic Director, Carol Shillibeer as Financial Coordinator.
- Has been interesting and exciting to be a part of Van Slam and Verses and the development of WordPlay. And it has been a great privilege to be a part of this. Impressed with rapid response to pandemic in terms of shifting online.
- Thanks fellow board members for their work this year, maintaining regular communication to hold one another accountable to tasks beyond the regular scope of board work. Thanks to former board members. Acknowledging how much former board members have put into improving VPH's stability and processes. As well as community members who have stepped forward with concerns and opportunities for growth.
- **Staffing Updates:**
 - Carol stepping down from Financial Coordinator position. Looking forward to Welcoming a new member to the team.
 - I recently resigned from the position of volunteer coordinator due to lack of work during the pandemic. A hiring process to find a replacement has not yet begun,

as there currently is not a significant need for a volunteer coordinator.

Here are a few highlights of the past year:

- For context two years ago, this organization was turned on its head and came very close to collapse. It took months of hard work to build structures to support the future of VPH, and in the past year we've been able to see it work to stabilize the organization and prevent future collapse. When the Policy Manual was voted into the structure of VPH last year, this was a huge step which has improved VPH's stability.
- Some new changes to the Policy Manual include:
 - A 3-month probationary term for newly elected Directors, with the purpose of allowing for a transition period prior to a 2-year commitment
 - Board votes are now allowed to take place online - a policy which was created prior to the pandemic but which has proved to be incredibly useful
- We have streamlined all of VPH's programs and have simultaneously built a new structure for staff. In the past, slam, verses, and wordplay effectively operated independently of one another, each program running their own finances and curation, but under this new structure, each program works with the others, with one financial coordinator, one arts administrator, and one volunteer coordinator handling administrative tasks across all three major VPH programs. This means that the slammaster, wordplay coordinator, and artistic director are able to focus on spoken word programming, while administration and finances are taken care of by staff who excel in these areas.
- We have adjusted the Board's operation within the organization to move from a working board to a governance board. This means that board members are no longer functionally unpaid staff, and tasks that board members had previously been doing have been fully shifted to staff. In tandem with this change, almost all staff members saw a significant wage increase in the past year, with planning in the budget for further increases in coming years.
- There is a chapbook currently in the works! Leslie and Frankie are the leads of that project, and I'm very excited to share the chapbook upon its completion

Not So Positive Updates:

- We started the year with 9 board members after the 2019 AGM. Right now, we have four, meaning that 5 people have left the board for various reasons. This indicates to me that there is room for improvement of the environment within which the board operates.
- We have received several emails and letters from community members detailing allegations of institutional racism within VPH, meaning that this organization allows for structural violence towards people of color. We have seen this in the past, and we've seen it within the past year. This is not acceptable, and raises the question of where do we go from here?

Current priorities/focus moving forward:

- The current focus of the Board is detailing an anti-racism work plan, with an emphasis on an audit of all of the Board's policies and processes. This board has committed to pursuing this work, regardless of the individual members who remain on the board or which individual members may join the board. This work is essential in honoring the community this organization serves, and must continue moving forward
- Round this out with an analogy, which helps me understand what is happening and helps me communicate what needs to be done. VPH is like a fridge, and that fridge is full of mouldy old tupperwares. And we keep making more food, curating more spoken word events, but ignoring the moldy tupperwares. The way I look at it is that we need to take out the tupperwares one by one, open them up, and face what this organization has done in the past. Even if someone else put the tupperware in the fridge, I'm one of the cooks in the kitchen, so I need to help clean up.
 - I get that it's a weird analogy, but it does help me make sense of my role on the board and my responsibility to the community that VPH serves.
- I would like to encourage people to stand for election for the board! This work is important, this community matters, the work VPH is doing and the potential for more and better work in the future is important.

Frankie moves agenda forward, introducing Leslie to do the treasurer's report.

Leslie Stark Treasure's Report:

- Introduces self. Had been treasurer for the organization in the past and stated would not want the job again. However when saw how well Carol had organized the finances of the

organization realized it was not as daunting a job as it used to be. Extends thanks to Carol in this regard.

- Shares screen for Financial Statements' PDF:
file:///C:/Users/Amanda/Desktop/VAN_POE%202019%20Financial%20Statements.pdf

Main aspects to note from Avisar Review:

- We have reviewed the accompanying financial statements of Vancouver Poetry House Society (the Society) that comprise the statement of financial position as at December 31, 2019, and the statements of changes in net assets, revenues and expenditures and cash flows for the year then ended, and a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information.
- Based on our review, nothing has come to our attention that causes us to believe that the financial statements do not present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Vancouver Poetry House Society as at December 31, 2019, and the results of its operations and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with ASNPO.
- Comparison of 2018 and 2019:
 - Net Assets: Excess (deficiency) of revenues over expenditure is \$10,555 Vs. 2018 at \$288.
 - Part of that had to do with grants received in 2019.
 - Private donations went down significantly. Primarily due to a private donor who did not donate this year
 - Programing revenue went down slightly
 - Administrative costs have gone up due to much needed wage increases
 - The 2019 “cash end of year” is lower. This is primarily due to payments which went out to venues which went out at the end of the year. Whereas in 2018 payments were not being made as efficiently
 - FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS
 - “The Society is exposed to various risks through its financial instruments and has a comprehensive risk management

framework to monitor, evaluate and manage these risks. The following analysis provides information about the Society's risk exposure and concentration as of December 31, 2019. It is management's opinion that the Society is not exposed to significant risks arising from these financial instruments."

- Brings up the current financial uncertainty due to COVID
- Sho asks about if we have any information from funders (regarding this). Any updates?
- Leslie response that so far we have had good news from funders (though obviously it's bad news from other revenue sources).
- For Verses we made the decision that all of the artists were paid. Of course this was a big cost but we thought it was really important that this happen. And while slam is happening online the revenue is significantly less. This makes us more dependent on government grants.
- We will definitely be hurting financially in 2020. A couple of our staff have taken brief leaves to reduce that impact already (which is generous but not sustainable).
- We have started fundraising and looking into fundraising options. But regardless we should be prepared for this year to look very different.

Secretary's Report

What I will be presenting here is an overview of where we have made significant positive changes, where we have failed, and where we are improving and need to continue to improve. While Holden has presented a broader work plan I will address some action items.

As outlined at the last AGM there were significant changes to the Bylaws. Andrew had stressed the importance of these in ensuring a strong organisation and one that worked toward equitable distribution of labor and was not overly dependent on one or two key members. In this area we did not shift fast enough which, combined with a lack of strong HR practices, led harm to community members and conflict within the board.

We were able to draft a board model but even within this HR practice remains too undefined.

The Centre for Community Organizations' mission is to help build a more socially just world by supporting the health and well-being of community organizations in Québec.

But their resources and research have been a great help and they are a valuable reference for further shaping HR practices.

Where we have been able to start implementation so far has been in our hiring practices. Coco offers ways they have improved their hiring practices and Colleen was very receptive of this share and has already implemented some key points in the recruitment of a new Financial Coordinator. The anonymization of applications, transparency of process for applicants (timeline what to expect). The replacement of cover letters with a google form is a practice we intend to implement along with unnecessary qualifications that cause barriers (especially around university degrees and only looking at paid experience)

There have been some improvements to the pay scale of staff as a result of sound financial procedure but there is still a need for better cohesion and communication between program staff and staff and board members. Better unified HR practice ensuring staff feels safe and supported. As I've worked closely with some staff members and attempted to stay in communication with others this is an area I would be willing to volunteer my time in continuing to shore up even if no longer on the board.

With regards to broader action items there is a need to **Remove policy barriers** to be more inclusive and supportive of board diversity. First off the Boards Code of Conduct has been flagged as supporting structural racism and containing ableism. Ideally this would be included in a broader diversity audit (for which we have applied for funding and are still waiting to hear back on) but failing this (in the event there is no grant) I would want this reviewed independently within three months.

One item we were able to resolve which was flagged by a community member was the recently instituted 3 month probationary period on the board. This period remains in place but prior to a vote June 14th 2020 new members on probation would not have been able to vote on motions. This aspect was removed from the policy.

Increased outreach is needed and is another actionable item which can create artistic opportunities while supporting community goals. As Examples: Working with organizations such as the people's paper co-op or Book Clubs for Inmates in a way that “ advances, federates, shelters & maintains poetry in Vancouver with equal respect for the literary and oral traditions.”

Member Access. Board meetings are now more consistent (the first Sunday of the month at two pm). While we had worked to make minutes more accessible this was primarily done via the blog with drive links. I have backdated scheduled meetings along with summary agendas in a minutes and agendas tab on the website from 2018. The minutes are accessible in this tab in both word and pdf form. This project could continue with the further backdating of minutes within this tab. It is also something I would be willing to volunteer to work on beyond my board role.

Posted a Statement acknowledging systemic racism within the Organization///**Survey Results**///What We Have for a Work Plan so Far:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kBCpiRvaPgAalxtlLykWck3h_KHS94ZQaq1A1SkCik8/edit

Colleen introduces self

Arts Administrator's Report

Delivered by Colleen Brown

Summary

The administrative work was done by Carol Shillibeer and Colleen Brown this year. Our administrative goals for 2019/2020 before the pandemic were to:

- move VPH from the Explore and Create to the Engage and Sustain 4 year Canada Council stream
- introduce professional development for all one year renewable independent contractors and board members,
- improve the understanding of contracts and make the use of contracts mandatory and improve insurance,
- support a festival,
- close the social media channels that were being used for hate speech,
- develop more formal communications with members, community, artists, staff,
- place VPH on a clearly expressed 3 month, 1 year, 4 year planning calendar,
- increase the valuing of professionalism in the arts,
- move to G-Suite,
- develop partnerships for youth programs.

I embraced the goals of professionalization and regularizing planning processes because it is my belief that the racism, aggression and hurt experienced at Vancouver Poetry House is partly caused by inconsistent professional practices. I also believe there is misplaced resistance or misunderstanding of professional practices that are holding the community in a pattern of harm.

Our administrative goals after the pandemic were to:

- pay out all festival related artist fees, short-term contracts, invoices,
- find ways to continue to pay one year renewable independent contractors,
- quickly move some programming online,
- slowly think about what makes sense during the pandemic,

- continue to support partnerships,
- apply for government and foundation funding directed toward pandemic survival,
- develop a new plan for the new budget.

Planning

Finding the time to plan and fortitude to stick to a plan is difficult for all artist run not-for-profits. Like many societies, Vancouver Poetry House occasionally falls into the habit of making vague plans and then altering or dropping them. I think this comes from falling from one emergency into the next without pause in between.

Having lead time makes:

- collaboration and consultation possible,
- using procedures designed to reduce bias possible,
- respecting peoples' labour more likely,
- growth and learning more likely.

In the coming year independent contractors on a one year renewable contract will be required to report to the board every three months without exception. The report will include plans looking three months ahead. The newly formed board will review the themes on the one year board calendar to fit their goals for the coming year.

Contracts

There is resistance to signing contracts in the community. In the process of discussing contracts VPH has developed better contracts and better understanding of contracts in this year. We are now able to express why they are important and know where it is possible to be flexible.

In the coming year, everyone will have a signed contract who works with Vancouver Poetry House.

Communications

Most of the social media channels were left wide open. At some point in history that must have made sense. It does not make sense now. Youtube in particular was widely abused and exposed poets to hate speech on a regular basis.

Youtube comments are closed. I believe we might be better served by closing comments on some of our other, less generative, channels and will discuss this with our staff in the coming year. Some of our communications have become more formal which changes the flavour. I'm trying to be careful when formal language is used.

Change in Canada Council Funding Stream

We chose to change the funding stream VPH applies to at the Canada Council which has implications for programming at VPH. We moved from a stream with a pinnacle that would support ever-increasing international exchange and advancing artists to an international stage to a stream with more of a community focus.

"Engage and Sustain fosters a vibrant foundation for the arts in Canada by supporting arts organizations at the heart of Canada's creative communities.

This program funds organizations that are dedicated to developing excellence in arts practice, advancing the arts through programming, and exposing a diverse public to a range of artists and creative works."

We received \$45,000 per year for four years from this grant. This is the same as the final year of the previous core grant. Having core funding from the CC makes getting other funding easier. It also enforces some of the professionalization occurring at VPH.

Partnerships

We had partnerships with two organizations planned for this year, one with the Kwantlen Cultural Centre and the other with Broadway Youth. The partnership with Broadway Youth will go ahead using an online format. The partnership with the Kwantlen Cultural Centre has been put on hold.

Professional Development

People holding one year renewable independent contracts with VPH are now given a small yearly stipend to pursue professional development of their choice. For on-going roles at VPH (teaching poets, hosts, active listeners) we would like to develop yearly professional development opportunities. We conducted one in 2019 for the WordPlay poets and scheduled one for hosts which was cancelled. This year some of our training funds will go towards learning on-line skills, bringing teaching assistants into workshop settings. Along with the anti-oppression training planned by the board we are also hoping to give staff and board arts management training.

A new plan for a new budget

The festival may need to be radically changed. I am researching the idea of paying artists before rather than after they complete a work/performance to see if that makes things easier for artists. We may also need to seriously alter the kinds of support we offer artists, for example, perhaps money would be better spent on production than on venues. These decisions will be finalized in December.

Concern expressed over board's ability to effectively follow through on work plan.
Voting on motions held via email, online ballots.

AGM sequence of events

- Check Members In

- Call meeting to order
 - Land acknowledgement
 - Thank everyone for coming
 - Joseph's Poem

- Housekeeping (HOLDEN)
 - Welcome/introduce board members
 - Virtual rules
 - Online discussion can be difficult! The following guidelines are to encourage everyone to participate as they are able without interrupting others or being interrupted, except, of course, in the event of personal targeted attacks or hate speech.
 - Everyone has a loose 2 min recommendation, to allow everyone the space to speak. If you pass 3 minutes speaking, Holden will turn on his mic and gently let you know that you have passed time and to please wrap up your comments to allow the next person to speak.
 - If you would like to speak, please enter an asterix in the chat (*), if you have a direct response to something that is being said, please enter a DR in the chat
 - Explain prioritization of * vs DR - DR gets priority
 - If you agree with what someone else is saying and would like that to be seen, but do not necessarily want or need to speak, you can enter a +++ in the chat. It's kind of like twinkly fingers, like "yes i hear you and I agree, this resonates for me"
 - Holden and Frankie are co-chairing the meeting, Holden will keep an eye on the chat and will keep track of attendees who wish to speak.
 - Please keep your microphone muted unless it is your turn to speak; this reduces background noise and echos
 - There is no obligation to have your camera on or off, it is your choice
 - How voting works
 - Voting is completely online, and completely anonymous. Only VPH members using their unique login information are able to access the ballot and vote.
 - Every member with voting rights should have already received their login information in an email. If you have not received your email, be sure to check your spam, and if you still do not have your information, please private message Holden and he can send it to you.
 - Each motion will be recorded as it is made, and will be added to an online ballot on the platform eballot.io

- Near the end of the meeting, after the board election nominations and community discussion, the ballots will be activated and voting members will be given 20 minutes to access their ballots and vote. There will be two separate ballots to vote on: one for the board elections, and one for all other motions. If voting members have trouble with the software, Holden will be on standby to provide support through the bluejeans private chats
 - At the end of the 20-minute voting period, we'll return and Holden will do a screenshare to share the results of the ballots
 - Voting support - direct questions to Holden in the chat
 - Check in with Amanda regarding voting members being checked
- Approve agenda for this AGM
- Approve minutes:
 - Approve Addendum from the 2019 EGM
 - Approve AGM minutes

President's speech/Report - speaking notes (feel free to drop in whole doc text if easier)

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LSxDRX7QpvRLhsVi_hbQyvwPAJIdO9J6PUBly1rr_J4/edit

- Thank the staff and Explain new job opening
 - Carol: There Will be a New Financial Coordinator and the nature of the job
 - Colleen
 - Joseph
 - Tessa
 - Sam
- I would like to encourage people to consider running for the board, most of our board started this year without much "board" experience and I think all of us found meaningful ways to contribute.

Treasurer's Report

- Presenting the 2019 financials
- Starting with this as we do need to quickly go over current covid financial state
- **Artistic Director's Report for AGM July 19, 2020:**

As like everyone I have been adjusting to a very solitary life even though I was solitary to begin with it has been a journey of being able to meet with folks online as well as a few teaching opportunities and reading as well. Also having new books come out and trying to promote them online has been quite weird. But it's weird.

- I was also not prepared for the cancellation of Verses as this was my first creation for VPH and I was at first stunned and then I began work on seeing what sort of creations VPH and the Artists could come up with and we have seen most but there were a few exceptions that we could not create but we are working on those.
- **Examples of Artists submitting events online:**
 - Darren Charlie videoed how to make a drum. I donated the drums to the elders at Carnegie and they picked them up from me and they were so happy and grateful.
 - Jules sent in a video of a reading
 - Isabella Wang sent in a video of poetry.
 - Kelsey Charlie is to send in video of new song for the community.
 - Lillian Allen will be sending in a video of workshop and reading in August.
 - Willie Charlie opted to wait for next year and did not request payment.
 - Willie Padermo has also requested to wait until next year.
- This is just some of what we have so far. I will be keeping in contact with Presenters and will have more to share in the future.
- **I have been working with Colleen on the hiring a new finance person.**
- I hope in the future that we will be able to present Verses to the public but until then we shall be looking at online opportunities.
- Art Administrator's Report:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PycRDWArT9aadl7gZrGATuycEAKatjrGFrZkyY6LvK8/edit>
- Secretary's Report:

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Results///What We Have for a Work Plan so Far:

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Election and Other Business

-explain that voting is a majority decision

-nominations come from the floor, people can nominate themselves or another person present.

If someone else nominates you, you can accept or decline. If you accept, your name goes on the ballot

Voting ballots go LIVE - 20 minutes for voting/break, return to bluejeans meeting to do a screenshare and share voting results. Encourage those who have not yet participated in the survey to do so during this time slot: <https://forms.gle/8M6V8mGWNQGPY6HA8>

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Willie Padermo has also requested to wait until next year.

This is just some of we have so far. I will be keeping in contact with Presenters and will have more to share in the future.

I have been working with Colleen on the hiring a new finance person.

I hope in the future that we will be able to present Verses to the public but until then we shall be looking at online opportunities.

Joseph

President's report for 2020 AGM

Thank yous

- I'd like to begin by extending my gratitude to the staff who have worked with VPH this year. Sam, Tessa, Colleen, Joseph, Carol. The programming at VanSlam, the planning for Verses, and the developments in Wordplay have been very exciting to watch and to be a part of. And while we ultimately had to cancel the 2020 Verses festival because of the coronavirus pandemic, it was a great privilege to be able to bear witness to the care and thoughtfulness that went into the curation for the festival, as well as the rapid response to the covid pandemic in cancelling the Verses festival and imagining new ways of sharing spoken word.
- I would like to thank my fellow board members for their work this year, maintaining regular communication to hold one another accountable to tasks beyond the regular scope of board work.
- I would also like to thank former board members for their contributions. The work that has been done in the past year has not been the fruit of the current board members alone, and some former board members have put in a lot of effort to help improve VPH's stability and processes.
- I am also deeply grateful to community members who have stepped forward with concerns and opportunities for growth. This demonstrates, to me at least, that the community cares about the operations of VPH and would like to see improvements moving forward.

Staffing

- Our financial coordinator, Carol Shillibeer, will be stepping down from her position at the end of August. A hiring process is underway, applications for the position closed last week and I am looking forward to welcoming a new member to the team.
- I recently resigned from the position of volunteer coordinator due to lack of work during the pandemic. A hiring process to find a replacement has not yet begun, as there currently is not a significant need for a volunteer coordinator.

Good updates of the past year

Here are a few highlights of the past year:

- Two years ago, this organization was turned on its head and came very close to collapse. It took months of hard work to build structures to support the future of VPH, and in the past year we've been able to see it work to stabilize the organization and

prevent future collapse. When the Policy Manual was voted into the structure of VPH last year, this was a huge step which has improved VPH's stability.

- Some new changes to the Policy Manual include:
 - A 3-month probationary term for newly elected Directors, with the purpose of allowing for a transition period prior to a 2-year commitment
 - Board votes are now allowed to take place online - a policy which was created prior to the pandemic but which has proved to be incredibly useful
- We have streamlined all of VPH's programs and have simultaneously built a new structure for staff. In the past, slam, verses, and wordplay effectively operated independently of one another, each program running their own finances and curation, but under this new structure, each program works with the others, with one financial coordinator, one arts administrator, and one volunteer coordinator handling administrative tasks across all three major VPH programs. This means that the slammaster, wordplay coordinator, and artistic director are able to focus on spoken word programming, while administration and finances are taken care of by staff who excel in these areas.
- We have adjusted the Board's operation within the organization to move from a working board to a governance board. This means that board members are no longer functionally unpaid staff, and tasks that board members had previously been doing have been fully shifted to staff. In tandem with this change, almost all staff members saw a significant wage increase in the past year, with planning in the budget for further increases in coming years.
- There is a chapbook currently in the works! Leslie and Frankie are the leads of that project, and I'm very excited to share the chapbook upon its completion :)

Not-so-good updates of the past year

I also have some updates that are perhaps less exciting, but equally as important to share with you.

- We started the year with 9 board members after the 2019 AGM. Right now, we have four, meaning that 5 people have left the board for various reasons. This indicates to me that there is room for improvement of the environment within which the board operates.
- We have received several emails and letters from community members detailing allegations of institutional racism within VPH, meaning that this organization allows for structural violence towards people of color. We have seen this in the past, and we've seen it within the past year. This is not acceptable, and raises the question of where do we go from here?

Current priorities/focus moving forward

- The current focus of the Board is detailing an anti-racism work plan, with an emphasis on an audit of all of the Board's policies and processes. This board has committed to pursuing this work, regardless of the individual members who remain on the board or which individual members may join the board. This work is essential in honoring the community this organization serves, and must continue moving forward
- Because the history of racism in VPH extends for several years, the way I look at it is in an analogy, which helps me understand what is happening and helps me communicate what needs to be done. VPH is like a fridge, and that fridge is full of mouldy old tupperwares. And we keep making more food, curating more spoken word events, but ignoring the moldy tupperwares. The way I look at it is that we need to take out the tupperwares one by one, open them up, and face what this organization has done in the past. Even if someone else put the tupperware in the fridge, I'm one of the cooks in the kitchen, so I need to help clean up.
 - I get that it's a weird analogy, but it does help me make sense of my role on the board and my responsibility to the community that VPH serves.

Encourage people to stand for election for the board! This work is important, this community matters, the work VPH is doing and the potential for more and better work in the future is important

What I will be presenting here is an overview of where we have made significant positive changes, where we have failed, and where we are improving and need to continue to improve. While Holden has presented a broader work plan I will address some action items.

As outlined at the last AGM there were significant changes to the Bylaws. Andrew had stressed the importance of these in ensuring a strong organisation and one that worked toward equitable distribution of labor and was not overly dependent on one or two key members. In this area we did not shift fast enough which, combined with a lack of strong HR practices, led harm to community members and conflict within the board.

We were able to draft a board model but even within this HR practice remains too undefined.

The Centre for Community Organizations' mission is to help build a more socially just world by supporting the health and well-being of community organizations in Québec. But their resources and research have been a great help.

Where we have been able to start implementation of their practices so far has been in our hiring practices. [Coco](#) offers ways they have improved their hiring practices and Colleen was very receptive of this share and has already implemented some key points. The anonymization of applications, transparency of process for applicants (timeline what to expect). The replacement of cover letters with a google form is a practice we intend to implement along with unnecessary qualifications that cause barriers (especially around university degrees and only looking at paid experience)

There have been significant improvements to the pay scale of staff as a result of sound financial procedure but there is still a need for better cohesion and communication between program staff and staff and board members. Better unified HR practice ensuring staff feels safe and supported. As I've worked closely with some staff members and attempted to stay in communication with others this is an area I would be willing to volunteer my time in continuing to shore up even if no longer on the board.

With regards to broader action items there is a need to **Remove policy barriers** to be more inclusive and supportive of board diversity. First off the Boards Code of Conduct has been flagged as supporting structural racism and containing latent ableism. Ideally this would be included in a broader diversity audit (for which we have applied for funding) but failing this it should be reviewed independently within three months.

One item we were able to resolve which was flagged by a community member was the recently instituted 3 month probationary period on the board. This period remains in

place but prior to a vote June 14th 2020 new members on probation would not have been able to vote on motions. This was removed from the policy.

Increased outreach is another actionable item which can create artistic opportunities while supporting community goals. Working with organizations such as the [people's paper co-op](#) or [Book Clubs for Inmates](#) in a way that “ advances, federates, shelters & maintains poetry in Vancouver with equal respect for the literary and oral traditions.”

Member Access. Board meetings are now more consistent (the first Sunday of the month at two pm). While we had worked to make minutes more accessible this was primarily done via the blog with drive links. I have backdated scheduled meetings along with summary agendas in a minutes and agendas tab on the website from 2018. The minutes are accessible in this tab in both word and pdf form. This project could continue with the further backdating of minutes within this tab. It is also something I would be willing to volunteer to work on beyond my board role.

Arts Administrator's Report

Delivered by Colleen Brown

Summary

The administrative work was done by Carol Shillibeer and Colleen Brown this year. Our administrative goals for 2019/2020 before the pandemic were to:

- move VPH from the Explore and Create to the Engage and Sustain 4 year Canada Council stream
- introduce professional development for all one year renewable independent contractors and board members,
- improve the understanding of contracts and make the use of contracts mandatory and improve insurance,
- support a festival,
- close the social media channels that were being used for hate speech,
- develop more formal communications with members, community, artists, staff,
- place VPH on a clearly expressed 3 month, 1 year, 4 year planning calendar,
- increase the valuing of professionalism in the arts,
- move to G-Suite,
- develop partnerships for youth programs.

I embraced the goals of professionalization and regularizing planning processes because it is my belief that the racism, aggression and hurt experienced at Vancouver Poetry House is partly caused by inconsistent professional practices. I also believe there is misplaced resistance or misunderstanding of professional practices that are holding the community in a pattern of harm.

Our administrative goals after the pandemic were to:

- pay out all festival related artist fees, short-term contracts, invoices,
- find ways to continue to pay one year renewable independent contractors,
- quickly move some programming online,
- slowly think about what makes sense during the pandemic,
- continue to support partnerships,
- apply for government and foundation funding directed toward pandemic survival,
- develop a new plan for the new budget.

Planning

Finding the time to plan and fortitude to stick to a plan is difficult for all artist run not-for-profits. Like many societies, Vancouver Poetry House occasionally falls into the habit of making vague plans and then altering or dropping them. I think this comes from falling from one emergency into the next without pause in between.

Having lead time makes:

- collaboration and consultation possible,
- using procedures designed to reduce bias possible,
- respecting peoples' labour more likely,
- growth and learning more likely.

In the coming year independent contractors on a one year renewable contract will be required to report to the board every three months without exception. The report will include plans looking three months ahead. The newly formed board will review the themes on the one year board calendar to fit their goals for the coming year.

Contracts

There is resistance to signing contracts in the community. In the process of discussing contracts VPH has developed better contracts and better understanding of contracts in this year. We are now able to express why they are important and know where it is possible to be flexible.

In the coming year, everyone will have a signed contract who works with Vancouver Poetry House.

Communications

Most of the social media channels were left wide open. At some point in history that must have made sense. It does not make sense now. Youtube in particular was widely abused and exposed poets to hate speech on a regular basis.

Youtube comments are closed. I believe we might be better served by closing comments on some of our other, less generative, channels and will discuss this with our staff in the coming year. Some of our communications have become more formal which changes the flavour. I'm trying to be careful when formal language is used.

Change in Canada Council Funding Stream

We chose to change the funding stream VPH applies to at the Canada Council which has implications for programming at VPH. We moved from a stream with a pinnacle that would support ever-increasing international exchange and advancing artists to an international stage to a stream with more of a community focus.

"Engage and Sustain fosters a vibrant foundation for the arts in Canada by supporting arts organizations at the heart of Canada's creative communities.

This program funds organizations that are dedicated to developing excellence in arts practice, advancing the arts through programming, and exposing a diverse public to a range of artists and creative works."

We received \$45,000 per year for four years from this grant. This is the same as the final year of the previous core grant. Having core funding from the CC makes getting other funding easier. It also enforces some of the professionalization occurring at VPH.

Partnerships

We had partnerships with two organizations planned for this year, one with the Kwantlen Cultural Centre and the other with Broadway Youth. The partnership with Broadway Youth will go ahead using an online format. The partnership with the Kwantlen Cultural Centre has been put on hold.

Professional Development

People holding one year renewable independent contracts with VPH are now given a small yearly stipend to pursue professional development of their choice. For on-going roles at VPH (teaching poets, hosts, active listeners) we would like to develop yearly professional development opportunities. We conducted one in 2019 for the WordPlay poets and scheduled one for hosts which was cancelled. This year some of our training funds will go towards learning on-line skills, bringing teaching assistants into workshop settings. Along with the anti-oppression training planned by the board we are also hoping to give staff and board arts management training.

A new plan for a new budget

The festival may need to be radically changed. I am researching the idea of paying artists before rather than after they complete a work/performance to see if that makes things easier for artists. We may also need to seriously alter the kinds of support we offer artists, for example, perhaps money would be better spent on production than on venues. These decisions will be finalized in December.

Who is Colleen?

Colleen is a sculptor. She explores the relationships of objects and materials as a means of thinking through abstraction and social encounters. Colleen holds a BFA from Emily Carr University, a BA Psyc, Simon Fraser University and an MFA from the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts, Bard College, New York. Her most recent solo exhibitions have been with Burrard Foundation and Unit 17, both in Vancouver. She has participated in recent exhibitions and events at Living Lab, Emily Carr University, Vancouver; Cooper Cole, Toronto; Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver; Western Gallery, Bellingham; Shelfed, Vancouver; Hedreen Gallery, Seattle; and The Apartment, Vancouver. Colleen is the recipient of the 2016 Portfolio Prize.

Colleen was the Program Coordinator at Artspeak, an artist-run not-for-profit gallery and publisher. She was a board member of Western Front, the oldest artist-run space in Vancouver which runs a number of programs including music, video and visual art. Colleen currently sits on the board of the Or Gallery, another of Vancouver's venerable not-for-profits.

Colleen is also a committed teacher. In the last few years, she has taught students of all ages, working with young children in galleries, with teens in the classroom and seniors as part of community-based work. She is a sessional faculty member at Emily Carr University teaching in the Sculpture Department and Continuing Studies Department. She has taught social practice in Emily Carr's Summer Institute for Teens, Studies in the Social Sciences, Faculty of Culture and Community and Studies in Humanities, Faculty of Critical and Cultural Studies.

Colleen is currently the holder of a BC Arts Council Project grant supporting her work in understanding how systems of art making can be used to dampen the impact of the spectacle of violence in our everyday lives and if systems of aestheticization can be used as a shield from situations that re-victimize people.

Working with VPH has helped develop Colleen's current project and has also helped her guide her students who want to pursue cultural work outside of the studio.