

## Membership: Next Steps

### Background

In September 2019, the Board received a report on membership that provided the background to the current membership situation of WACC and raised essential discussion points not just about how to increase membership in a time of decline but about the “value-added” of being a member (both to the member and to WACC) and whether there were better ways of organizing WACC.

After discussion the Board approved a motion asking the General Secretariat to review three of the suggested actions, taking into account comments made at the Board Meeting, to be presented to the Officers and then to the Board at a subsequent Meeting for approval.

The three suggested actions in the document were:

1. That WACC Global and the regional executive committees engage in a two-year concerted membership campaign (2020-2021). Digital communication resources (e.g. adaptable brochures, Powerpoint, intro video, artwork for roll up banner) will be provided by WACC Global and may be adapted as possible by regions. Our target by the end of the campaign is to have increased membership of each region by 20%.
2. That membership be more clearly about joining a global and regional movement of organizations and individuals committed to communication rights and that the process be simplified. This affirms the development of the “application” to be further modified as a “joining” form, with immediate acceptance. Regional officers will receive an updated list of members twice annually for outreach and to update contact details, within the requirements of data protection.
3. That WACC Global will continue to seek to improve the technical interface, e.g. allowing flexible payment of donations, online issuing of invoices for institutional transfers, access by members to their own data.

The questions raised in the Board discussion were:

*Does a Region still need to approve a new member?*

*Could a new member be given the option of what Region they wish to support?*

*How does WACC involve its members in its work?*

*How does WACC motivate its members?*

*How can members promote WACC?*

*Can project partners be required to join?*

A document on Members Forums was also referred to the Officers for review and possibly to be presented to a subsequent Board meeting.

### Legal basis and roles of members

WACC's legal basis for membership is incorporated in the **WACC UK Articles of Association** (latest version June 2018). This cannot be changed except by going through the process of revising the Articles and submitting them for approval to the UK Charity Commission.

Article 3 lays out the basis for two classes of membership, Corporate and Personal members, with only Corporate members entitled to vote. There is reference in Article 7f that members pay a subscription (and that “if he, she or it fails to pay a subscription for two successive years or for any three years out of five” they will cease to be a member.)

The same Article 3 gives the Board of Directors the power to create (and remove) additional classes of membership through the Byelaws, which can be amended by the Board alone. (This is the case for Honorary Life Membership, and Affiliate Status)

Article 9: indicates all members shall be organised into Regional Associations. Within the Articles, the required role of the Regional Associations is to nominate candidates for election (Article 11 and 31b).

There is no legal requirement to hold an annual general meeting. The Articles stipulate procedures for general meetings if they are called, with the reiteration that only Corporate Members may vote, and that a quorum of 10 members (“save as herein otherwise provided”) entitled to vote be reached.

Article 31e: (Corporate) members elect the President.

Article 31m: Those nominated to be directors must be Corporate or Personal members.

The **Byelaws** may be amended by a majority of at least two-thirds of the Board of Directors present and voting at a directors meeting. The Byelaws must be consistent with the Articles and the Memorandum of Understanding. Changes to the Byelaws shall be reported to the next General Meeting.

Byelaw 3 states that Regional Associations “shall encourage the development of specialised media sections with the Regions and of national associations of Corporate and Personal members.”

Byelaws 9 and 13 provide for the Board to decide within 12 months with a provision for regional associations to make a recommendation.

Byelaw 10 states that decisions on the membership of Global organisations are taken by the Board of Directors.

*In summary: Unless there is determination that WACC should again revise its governing document, WACC must have in some way, at a minimum, operational Corporate members and regional associations, and for the purposes of nominating candidates to the Board, personal membership for individuals who are not part of a Corporate member.*

*The Board, however, has the power to create additional classes of membership, or to revise the process of membership.*

*Note: As approved by the September 2019 board, 100% of membership fees are returned to regional associations.*

## **Reponses to Board questions:**

*Does a Region still need to approve a new member?*

The Board has ultimate responsibility to approve, with the preference for a recommendation from the regional association. The Board could, for instance, revise the Byelaws to assigning responsibility for accepting members to the General Secretary, notifying the relevant regional associations upon acceptance and the Board at least annually.

*Could a new member be given the option of what Region they wish to support?*

The practice has been for the person or institution to be a member of the region in which they reside. There is no legal or policy basis to prevent providing an option to decide which

region to join. The practical implication is that the membership fee would go to another region. Do we want that?

*Can the regions have access to old member contact information?*

WACC follows the regulations set out by the General Data Protection Regulations which, broadly, require consent by the individual to the use of their data. While this consent process is being used now, it has not been used in past applications. For “legitimate business purposes” we can share the contact data. Thus, if a regional association requests old contact details for the one-time purpose of a membership campaign, this could be justified. But consent must then be given by the individual for all subsequent contacts, and there must be an identified way for individuals to change their consent (i.e. Unsubscribe).

*How does WACC involve its members in its work?*

WACC Global informs and on occasion canvasses opinions or seeks advice and action (i.e. a vote for GMMP for a WSIS prize). Members who become more active in WACC activities may be requested to join regional or international meetings or write articles for Media Development. Members are involved in elections of directors and the President.

The way in which WACC has been organised, most member engagement is seen as part of the work of regional associations. There the regions are able to organise themselves (i.e. allowing both corporate and personal members to vote), share information, and engage in activities which are a priority for the regional context. The limitations are time (as all WACC members are “volunteers” for the association) and funding (depending on the amount of membership fees returned to the region and any grant funding from external sources).

*How does WACC motivate its members?*

WACC aims to attract people to its vision of communication for all and its ability to network people with similar personal and professional interests on a regional basis. In the past, WACC was able to channel more funding for projects at regional/community level and there were member gatherings (Congress) which usually boosted membership and certainly were effective networking times. These were strong “motivations” for membership which no longer exist. The follow up question then is: “How can WACC – globally and regionally – better motivate and involve its members?”

*How can members promote WACC?*

Currently members can promote WACC via social media; locally and nationally at meetings and gatherings they are involved in; where appropriate via media outlets.

*Can project partners be required to join?*

WACC could require this, but some partners will not wish to. This can also lead to a question of practice – is it a requirement to receiving funding that you are a member?

*Proposal for Members Forum*

A proposal to permit groups of individual members within regions to become “Corporate Members” and thus able to vote in General Meetings and in the election of the President came out of recommendations from the First Directors of WACC Canada in the context of revisions to the WACC Canada Constitution. At the time, there was the sense from some personal members that they desired more inclusion in the votes on matters impacting the life of WACC.

Within the new governing structure, one question would be whether personal members still feel a similar need for inclusion in voting, given that the requirements for member voting on the Global level are reduced. A second issue would be the additional administrative monitoring of such forums at global level to make sure they conform to the guidelines (e.g. minimum of 8 current members) as well as questions about how such forums vote (e.g.

electing a representative, and determining how they agree to vote following a general meeting discussion?) The third is that under the WACC UK Articles, this additional category of membership would need to be formally adopted in the Byelaws. Finally, the revised governance structure affirms regional associations as the key places for members to discuss, engage, decide on regional elections and activities.

At a time when WACC is looking at ways to make membership / involvement easier and more engaging, it may be better to look at all issues more holistically and strengthen one effective structure.

If we look beyond “membership”, the larger questions are: How can WACC engage and inspire support (including financial support) from organisations and individuals? How can WACC be governed responsibly and effectively?

### **Proposed next steps**

The following propositions might be considered.

1. That we do not want to go through the legal process of a revision of the Articles of Association; thus the current understanding and inclusion of corporate and personal members stands.
2. That engagement and support happen when people see and feel concrete value – whether that is from identifying with a particular story, to seeing a need being met effectively, to being personally involved in an action or project.
3. That it is most likely that such value can be encountered best on the regional or even national level. Regional Executive Committees should be encouraged to consider:
  - a. What are the 3 greatest barriers to increasing WACC membership and support in the region?
  - b. What 3 things could the regional association realistically do to overcome these barriers?
  - c. What 3 things would be most helpful from WACC Global to help overcome these barriers?
  - d. Whether the regional rules and regulations support active engagement by all members.
  - e. That these reflections should be communicated to the Board of Directors to help determine the level of support possible for regions.
4. That WACC Global should ensure that membership and support processes, including the technical interfaces, are efficient and fit for purpose.
5. That the Board of Directors amend the byelaws to delegate to the General Secretary the approval of member applications, reporting decisions to the respective regions and the Board.
6. That the application procedure be further simplified as a “joining” form and process.
7. That WACC follows the current system in terms of governance and member voting, while ensuring that processes are transparent and clearly communicated to all members, e.g. via the members update, reports from directors to their regions, messages from the President and/or General Secretary.
8. That without prejudicing the reflections and recommendations from the regions, that WACC Global proceeds to:
  - a. Consider further membership “values”, e.g. exclusive access to webinars and resources for professional development.
  - b. Develop a membership campaign strategy, with budget including digital communication resources (e.g. adaptable brochures, Powerpoint, intro video, artwork for roll up banner)

- c. Map the involvement of members in WACC's international, regional and national activities and share this with the Board, regional executives, and members as a whole to encourage further exchange.