



**ACJS Board Meeting Minutes Friday April 10, 2025
Virtual at 12:00 p.m. Central Time**

- I. **CALL TO ORDER:** Executive Director John Worrall in President Stephanie Mizrahi's absence.
- II. **ATTENDANCE** Bitna Kim, David Myers, Sanja Kutnjak, Leah Daigle, Erin Orrick, Melissa Burek, John Stogner, Ming-Li Hsieh, Christine Tartaro, Camille Gibson, Brie Diamond, John Worrall, Letiscia Perrin.

Three board members were not on the call due to schedule conflicts. Two dropped off early. A quorum was present throughout the full meeting. Ten voting board members were present for each vote.

Guests: Tonya Almond, Jennifer O'Grady, and Cory Fransway from Maritz.

- III. **WELCOME:** Worrall made welcome remarks and introduced the three agenda items and the guests from Maritz. He continued that there were talks before the pandemic about strategic planning that went on hold. This is a restart of those efforts. He noted that this meeting was necessary to allow new Board members to read materials before voting.

IV. **OLD BUSINESS**

(i) Maritz Design Studio Strategic

Jennifer O'Grady: This is about seeing how the future looks, the whole ecosystem of the conference event, and understanding that in the higher ed space we are seeing a small quantity of a drop off in attendance.

This is about understanding the overall value proposition of what is being offered and where new strategies could be for strengthening engagement and investment in the annual meeting, specifically looking at whether you are charging enough money. Will the market bear a rate increase? Do you have the data to answer this? Granted, the country has changed since we started talking. We are hearing more from clients across markets about how cuts could affect conference attendance.

Maritz is the largest business events company in the world, managing just under 10,000 events a year in different capacities.

We track much data and monitor trends. Earlier this year, we published good news in an industry trends report that event costs were stabilizing, but not getting cheaper, even if more people attend. What can you absorb into your margin versus pass on to attendees?

We are trying to be proactive- what can be subsidized? Where? To raise a price, you need to be able to justify the value proposition to your audience. People shop their values. They spend on important things to them, e.g., Starbucks or \$10.00 eggs.

They will pay the money if it is necessary to enhance their career.

Tonya Almond: To maintain ACJS as it is and have it grow, you, as leaders, must understand your audience. It is an opportunity for existing members to influence the next generation of members. It is important to create value and grow revenue streams.

Jennifer O'Grady: Tonya and I do business consulting for Maritz. We use data to assist clients to attain their objectives. It is necessary to talk to people and survey them for a substantial understanding of the root problems or opportunities.

Cory Fransway: We work with hundreds of associations for whom the conference is the primary revenue source; for most, it is at least 50% or more of their annual income.

Worrall: Is the quoted pricing structure the same, given that it was a few months ago?

Fransway: We will honor that.

Worrall: Thank you. And let's say that we do not go headlong into it now, how would that pricing work?

O'Grady: We can section it out as time and budgets allow.

David Myers: The whole package was \$200,000? What other academic organizations have you served in this capacity?

O'Grady: We hear from clients who have bid on similar work that our pricing tends to come in at or below traditional market pricing, which is one of Maritz's benefits. We have in-house researchers and business consultants, so we can offer services that are below market research. Plus, we are familiar with your event, have a holistic view, and understand your needs. Clients tend to consider the ROI.

Examples of how we have helped clients in terms of their ROI:

*Address the very complex registration process that caused a drop in attendance.

*Trouble validating members.

* Losses from too many registration discounts.

*What we offer will be very specific to your organization and your event.

Fransway: Other points on your ROI, the speed at which to increase audience costs.

Where clients are not proactive about these things, it can lead to bankruptcy. Why let that happen? Times are changing with generational shifts- baby boomers exiting, Gen Z entering.

We have a ton of academic associations and a line of sight into the event experience. Not specifically this field, but your sister association is also very curious about this.

Almond: Another large academic group is looking at this as well, but in a different field.

Bitna Kim: From experience as past president, how fixable is a conference attendance problem with higher attendance costs? Although people want to come, their travel budget is just not there. Can we predict anything beyond even next year?

O'Grady: I cannot guarantee anything. We cannot make a promise. We do not even know the root cause until we start talking to people, and we need to find out this balance between what the perceived value proposition is for your members and what they say is most important to them. What do they tell us is the biggest obstacle for them to attend? The problem with funding and higher education is an environmental problem. We are very clear with clients that there are environmental factors we cannot change, but we can help you design around them. We will make strategic recommendations that you can start next year.

There will be some short-term quick wins, and there will be some longer-term higher-level effort investments. Our goal is always to deliver a plan that is manageable. "Rome was not built in a day."

Almond: And the goal would be sustainable growth and engagement.

Fransway: This means having a strategic mindset. We would look at five years or 10 years. For example, staffing that you need over time to be more profitable.

O'Grady: You need somebody to come in and say- Here are your quick wins. Here are the things you should be looking at for the future. Especially in higher ed, large corporations in this country are looking for a tax write-off, and all you have to do is say to them - Help sponsor this purpose.

David Myers: We want to be the best organization. The conference is only one part of it. How do we become the best?

O'Grady: With a holistic approach for sustained growth and development.

Almond: Membership growth, technology, business outcomes and guest impressions.

Fransway: What are the opportunity areas?

What are the things you should be considering because people want them, but they are not getting them from your organization, or they are getting them somewhere else and would rather just get them in one place?

[Guests departed]

John Worrall started the discussion, acknowledging strategic planning expertise within the organization, and asked the Board to focus on the assessment and pricing for today.

Discussion points:

- +Toward ACJS being the best, good move.
- +A fresh pair of eyes should be good.
- Not clear on what the pricing entails.
- Proposal lacks clarification, specifics, maybe case studies.
- Requires some leap of faith.
- Need to survey members - and interview more people than stated.

Letiscia Perrin: Most organizations do this every five years. The fact that ACJS has not (I have been here almost five years) is behind in knowing how to reach for the future. It is time to evaluate the membership, their values, and look at ways to make things fresh. If something else is going on, ACJS moves to the bottom. Why? Right now, we are doing well, 1,928 memberships early in the year, but I cannot tell you why.

Right now, our meeting is costing a total of \$200,000. But that \$400,000 meeting is coming - with Saturdays, 17 breakout rooms with AV, in places like Chicago and Philadelphia, plus union cost for days when there are 30 people in the mornings.

A good \$25,000 for 30 people to show up on Saturday does not make sense.

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There was general agreement, points emphasized the need to use data, and we have in-house survey and data collection expertise. Christine Tartaro offered to help identify these persons if necessary.

Point made that given the scope of the work, it would be good to have an outside entity take it on.

Motion by Erin Orrick, seconded by Melissa Burek to approve just the pricing analysis and assessment part.

Kim: What of the summer \$12,000 planning retreat?

Worrall: The summer event is tabled for now, until we get results from this. Although the \$12,000 for that event was approved, nothing has been scheduled. And if that money does not need to be spent, we can certainly do this first and revisit how to handle the strategic planning.

BOARD VOTE:

Pricing analysis and assessment (\$74,250) approved with a vote of 10-0 (no abstentions).

ACTION: The Executive Director will ask about surveying past members and getting copies of the questions to be asked.

(ii) Doctoral Student Summit ROI Proposal.

Discussion: Regarding the request by Heather Pfeifer, Chair of the ACJS Doctoral Student Summit, to access the ACJS membership data system and archived section and committee reports for a 'return on investment' evaluation to see the long-term outcomes of summit participation, especially regarding ACJS engagement.

BOARD VOTE:

Kim: Motion to approve the return on investment proposal from the Doctoral Student Summit Team with two conditions: a) National office staff have access to the data and b) provide the data.

Hsieh: seconded the motion.

Approved with a vote of 10-0 (no abstentions), with the following conditions:

1. Only national office staff will have access to the requested data
2. Data will be provided along with the report

(iii) Early Service Award, Cognella.

Discussion: Cognella has recently been a fixture at meetings, and the award includes funds. Some people in the field have a lower regard for this publisher.

The proposed Congella award is for the winner to receive \$1,500 cash and a plaque to be presented at the awards luncheon.

Suggestion to make this like the Sage award, not presented at the luncheon.

Need more clarity from the publisher on the award language.

ACTION: John Worrall will request this and see about an email vote later.

No vote. The proposal needs to be revamped to be controlled by the ACJS Awards Committee and not duplicate other publisher awards (Sage and Routledge).

ACTION: Executive Director will notify Maritz and Heather Pfeifer of the above as soon as possible.

V. ADJOURNMENT: Approximately 1:30 p.m. Central Time.

Respectfully submitted
Camille Gibson, ACJS Secretary.