Leadership Guide
Prepared for NSN Board Members

This guide is designed to supplement the information found in the NSN Bylaws providing more detailed information about board members' responsibilities and in some cases timelines for given tasks. This is viewed as a "living" document and will be updated to reflect current practices of the NSN Board.

August 18, 2024

Contents

A Brief History of the National Storytelling Network

Many storytellers mark the rebirth of the art of oral storytelling in the United States with the first night of storytelling organized by Jimmie Neil Smith in 1973 in Jonesborough, TN. Seated on hay bales, the audience participated in what would become an annual storytelling festival.

Two years later, on a crisp October day in 1975, in Jonesborough, Tennessee, people gathered to hear and to tell stories and took them back to their own communities. Kathryn Windham, a journalist, and storyteller slapped down $5 and said, "We need a membership organization, and I'm the first member."

Initially named the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling, the early focus centered on producing that annual festival in Jonesborough. As membership expanded storytellers created festivals and events all over the country. Storytelling increased in schools, libraries, national and state parks, corporations and non-profits, churches and places of physical and psychic healing, coffee shops and nightspots. During this time period, NAAPS underwent a name change and became NSA (National Storytelling Association).

 Renamed again in 1998 the National Storytelling Network is an international community of storytellers. In the fall of 1997, the NSA board changed the structure from one organization to two independent nonprofits with separate missions and different boards and staffs. **The National Storytelling Network (NSN)** became a national member organization comprised of a community of storytellers. The **International Storytelling Center(ISC)** continued to organize and run the National Storytelling Festival. Now all festival programming decisions are made by ISC. Then-Executive Director Jimmie Neil Smith had incorporated the Jonesborough, TN festival under NAPPS' 501(c)3 to avoid paying taxes on festival income. As a condition of the separation, NSA/NSN and ISC agreed on a 1999 contract which granted NSN 18% of gross festival receipts. However, in 2010 when ISC declared bankruptcy due to its debts, TN courts agreed to void the contract, leaving NSN in financial straits. Up to that time, NSN had two full time staff and one part-time accountant. In an effort to revitalize and be centrally located for their members, NSN relocated to Kansas City, MO, and incorporated as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Staff was reduced to one fulltime office manager.

From 2010 forward, the major income NSN received was through membership dues and conference fees from an annual summer storytelling conference. In 2022, it became clear that the organization was facing major financial concerns, partly due to the constraints that the COVID pandemic had placed on holding in-person conferences. There were insufficient funds to cover the salaries of paid staff. In the fall of 2022, NSN Bookkeeper Dorothy Cleveland took on the responsibility of monitoring the NSN website, answering questions from members and setting up ZOOM meetings in a volunteer capacity. Today, there is a "virtual office" in Kansas City, MO, since NSN is

incorporated as a 501(c)3 organization in the state of Missouri, but the day-to-day business is handled by Dot Cleveland from her home in Minnesota. Another hero of these difficult financial times has been Bob Johnson, NSN Treasurer. (Please note that both of these valuable members are ex-officio members of the NSN Board.) Both Dot and Bob were part of a transition team that guided the process of restructuring NSN. Except for the part-time position of bookkeeper, NSN is now entirely run by volunteers.

During the fall of 2022, a plan to restructure NSN was proposed by Trudy Hanson to the board and the general membership. Various online forums were held by then Board Chair Kory May to discover concerns of NSN members. The restructuring plan involved changing the make-up of the NSN Board to reflect leaders of the Storytelling Interest Groups (SIGS) and three additional appointed members (Public Relations Coordinator, the Publications Manager, and the Volunteer Coordinator) while ending the positions of regional directors and state liaisons. A 3-year officer rotation was set in place in which a Vice Chair-Elect would oversee committees, a Vice Chair would oversee programming, and the Chair would oversee appointed positions and conduct the monthly board meetings. After gaining approval from the NSN Board, the restructuring proposal was presented to the general membership who then voted acceptance. The new structure was implemented in the spring of 2023.

NSN held its first in-person storytelling conference since 2019 in Dumas Bay Conference Center, Federal Way, WA in July of 2024. Two hundred and eighty-two registered for the conference (87 joined virtually). Not only was the conference a celebration of being together again, but the conference brought in over $35,990 for the organization.

NSN continues to support individuals, organizations, and communities that foster the growth of storytelling in education, arts performance, organizational communications, healing arts, and beyond. Our creative and innovative members are the bedrock of our organization, sharing wisdom and expertise, encouraging excellence, and exploring new paths in storytelling. We believe in the transformative power of story. We value diversity. We are the National Storytelling Network: We grow storytellers.

Sources:

International Storytelling Center Website, https://www.storytellingcenter.net/our-story/

National Storytelling Network Website, https://storynet.org/about-nsn/

NSN Newsletter Archive, https://storynet.org/resources/nsn-newsletters/

NSN Mission and Vision Statement

Mission
The National Storytelling Network is a membership organization made up of individuals and organizations involved in storytelling. Its mission is to advance all forms of storytelling within the community through promotion, advocacy, and education.

Vision Statement
A world in which all people value the power of storytelling and its ability to connect, inspire, and instill respect within our hearts and communities.

Core Values

Responsive Innovation: Continuous adaptation of our work in response to changing and community needs.

Cultural Awareness and Engagement: Sensitivity and respect for diverse individuals and communities

Inclusion: Advancement of equity by elevating underrepresented voices.

Collaboration: Employing the power of storytelling as a way to support the missions of our partnering organizations.

Integrity: Acting with transparency, honesty, and sincerity.

NSN Definition of Storytelling

Storytelling is the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination

1. Storytelling is interactive.

Storytelling involves a two-way interaction between a storyteller and one or more listeners. The responses of the listeners influence the telling of the story. In fact, storytelling emerges from the interaction and cooperative, coordinated efforts of teller and audience. In particular, storytelling does not create an imaginary barrier between the speaker and the listeners. This is part of what distinguishes storytelling from the forms of theatre that use an imaginary "fourth wall." Different cultures and situations create different expectations for the exact roles of storyteller and listener – who speaks how often and when, for example – and therefore create different forms of interaction. The interactive nature of storytelling partially accounts for its immediacy and impact. At its best, storytelling can directly and tightly connect the teller and audience.

2. Storytelling uses words.

Storytelling uses language, whether it be a spoken language or a manual language such as American Sign Language. The use of language distinguishes storytelling from most forms of dance and mime.

3. Storytelling uses actions such as vocalization, physical movement and/or gesture.

These actions are the parts of spoken or manual language other than words. Their use distinguishes storytelling from writing and text-based computer interactions. Not all nonverbal language behaviors need to be present in storytelling. Some storytellers use body movement extensively, for example, whereas others use little or none.

4. Storytelling presents a story.

Storytelling always involves the presentation of a story—a narrative. Many other art forms also present story, but storytelling presents it with the other four components. Every culture has its own definition of story. What is recognized as a story in one situation may not be accepted as one in another. Some situations call for spontaneity and playful digression, for example; others call for near-exact repetition of a revered text. Art forms such as poetry recitation and stand-up comedy sometimes present stories and sometimes don't. Since they generally involve the other four components, they can be regarded as forms of storytelling whenever they also present stories.
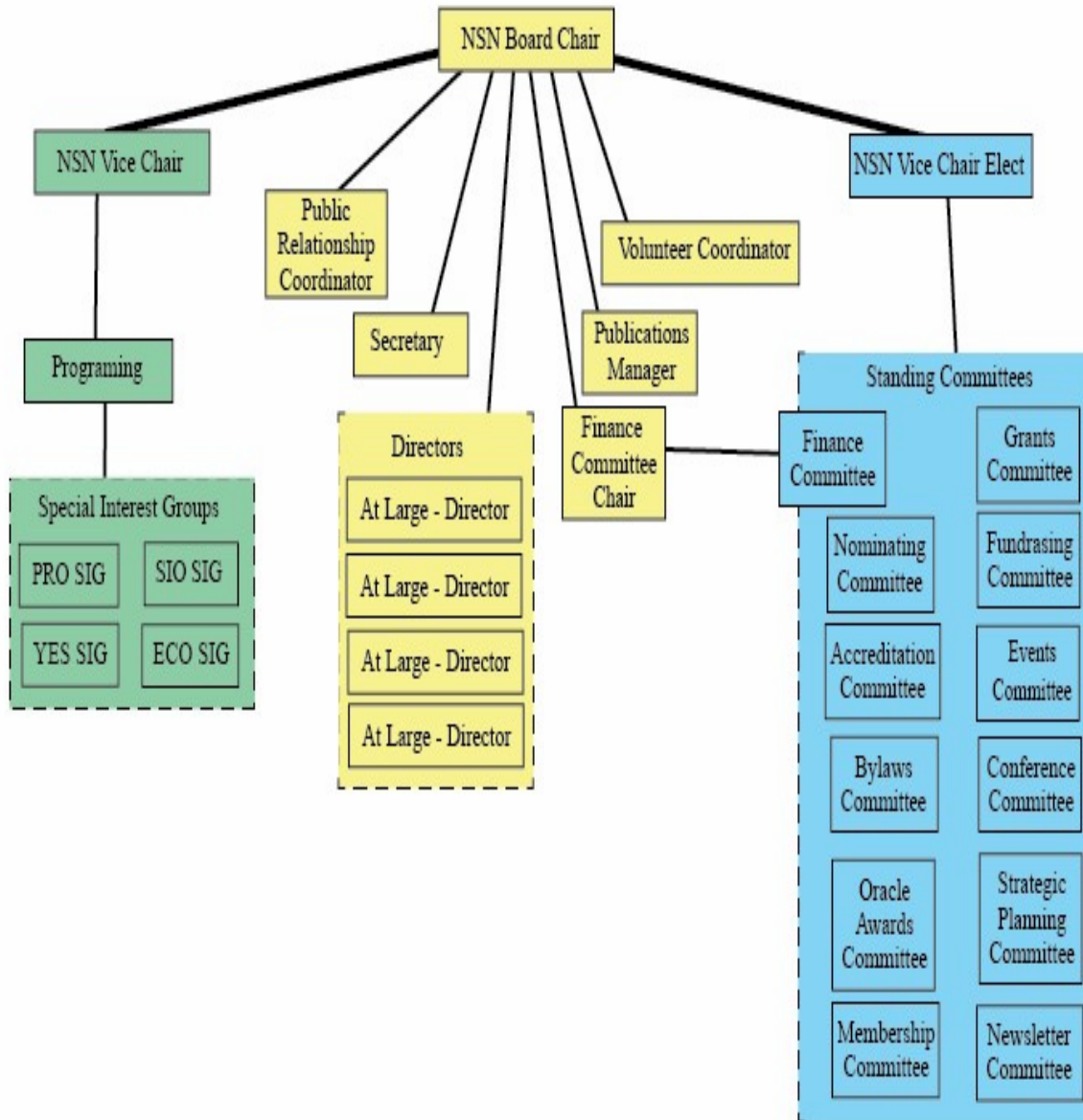
5. Storytelling encourages the active imagination of the listeners.

In storytelling, the listener imagines the story. In most traditional theatre or in a typical dramatic film, on the other hand, the listener enjoys the illusion that the listener is actually witnessing the character or events described in the story.
The storytelling listener's role is to actively create the vivid, multi-sensory images, actions, characters, and events—the reality—of the story in his or her mind, based on the performance by the teller and on the listener's own past experiences, beliefs, and

understandings. The completed story happens in the mind of the listener, a unique and personalized individual. The listener becomes, therefore, a co-creator of the story as experienced. Storytelling can be combined with other art forms. The fruit born by the vital, contemporary storytelling movement includes the development of ways to combine storytelling with drama, music, dance, comedy, puppetry, and numerous other forms of expression. Yet, even as it blends imperceptibly into other arts, the essence of storytelling remains recognizable as the intersection of the five components included in the above definition. Storytelling happens in many situations, from kitchen-table conversation to religious ritual, from telling in the course of other work to performances for thousands of paying listeners. Some storytelling situations demand informality; others are highly formal. Some demand certain themes, attitudes, and artistic approaches. As noted above, the expectations about listener interaction and the nature of the story itself vary widely. There are many cultures on earth, each with rich traditions, customs and opportunities for storytelling. All these forms of storytelling are valuable. All are equal citizens in the diverse world of storytelling.

NSN Organizational Chart

NSN Board Chair

- NSN Vice Chair
  - Programing
    - **Special Interest Groups**
      - PRO SIG
      - SIO SIG
      - YES SIG
      - ECO SIG
- Public Relationship Coordinator
- Secretary
- Volunteer Coordinator
- Publications Manager
- Finance Committee Chair
- **Directors**
  - At Large - Director
  - At Large - Director
  - At Large - Director
  - At Large - Director
- NSN Vice Chair Elect
  - **Standing Committees**
    - Finance Committee
    - Grants Committee
    - Nominating Committee
    - Fundrasing Committee
    - Accreditation Committee
    - Events Committee
    - Bylaws Committee
    - Conference Committee
    - Oracle Awards Committee
    - Strategic Planning Committee
    - Membership Committee
    - Newsletter Committee

(Chart designed by Caleb Hubbard)

NSN Board Member Responsibilities

Under the structure approved by the membership in the spring of 2023, the NSN Board is composed of the following members:

- **Chair**—who oversees all board meetings, acts as a spokesperson for the organization, presides at the annual membership meeting, oversees the work of the Public Relations Coordinator, the Publications Manager, and the Volunteer Coordinator. Often the chair also serves as an ex-officio member of the Conference Planning Committee. At the end of the one year term as chair, this officer serves on the board for one more year to advise as Immediate Past Chair.

- **Vice-Chair**—is charged with overseeing all programming of NSN and coordinating programs presented by the SIGS. The Vice-Chair serves as co-chair of the Conference Planning Committee. At the end of the term as Vice-Chair, this officer then advances to the office of Chair.

- **Vice-Chair Elect**—is charged with overseeing the work of the standing committees. This includes coordinating reports at monthly board meetings as needed. There are 12 standing committees: Finance Committee, Fundraising Committee, Bylaws Committee, Membership Committee, Accreditation Committee, Oracle Awards Committee, Grants Committee, Events Committee, Conference Committee, and Strategic Planning Committee. The composition of each committee is indicated in the Bylaws. At the end of the one year term as Vice Chair Elect, this officer then advances to the office of Vice Chair.

- **Secretary**—is elected by the Board of Directors from the members of the board. This officer records the official minutes of all board meetings and the annual general membership meeting. After the minutes have been approved by the President, the secretary then sends them to Dot Cleveland to be posted in the Membership area of the NSN website\

- **Public Relations Coordinator**--is appointed by the chair of the board, and oversees the organization's social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram), posting relevant information and photos of storytelling events. This officer is charged with public relations for NSN and promoting NSN events.

- **Publications Manager**—is an appointed position who oversees the work of the Newsletter Committee and coordinates the publication and the design of print and online materials by NSN. Works closely with the NSN Webmaster.

- **Volunteer Coordinator**— is an appointed position who is charged with organizing volunteers as needed to accomplish the work of NSN. This can include helping with organizational tasks or with organizing volunteers to help with the annual conference.

- **Finance Committee Chair**—This officer as stated in the Bylaws is a member of the Executive Committee. The Finance Chair generally gives a report about the organization's finances at each board meeting. The various budget documents are prepared by the Corporate Treasurer (Bob Johnson). This officer convenes the Finance Committee and the Fundraising Committee for regular meetings to discuss planned fundraising activities.

- **At Large Directors**—serve for 3 year terms. An At-Large Board member is expected to attend the monthly ZOOM Board Meetings. Additionally, each At-

Large Director is expected to share their expertise by serving on one or more of the standing committees. There may also be opportunities to serve on ad hoc committees which are appointed by the Chair for a specific task.

- **SIG Representatives**—are elected by each of the established SIGS and serve a 3 year term on the Board. SIG Representatives are asked to prepare a budget for their SIG and submit it to the Corporate Treasurer by the end of December each year. SIG Representatives give brief updates at each Board meeting. SIG representatives will meet regularly with SIG members and maintain a list of current members. SIG representatives also will regularly meet quarterly with one another to coordinate their activities. SIG Representatives serve on the Conference Planning Committee, helping evaluate proposals for acceptance. SIG Representatives are encouraged to send all promotional materials to Dot Cleveland to distribute on the StoryTell List serve and post on the NSN webpage.

NSN Standing Committees

As of the date of this Leadership Guide, NSN has 12 Standing Committees. The Executive Committee is a standing committee designed to be able to make quick decisions when a meeting of the entire Board is not possible. Committees are listed in the order in which they appear in the Bylaws.

Executive Committee is composed of the Chair, the Vice Chair, the Vice Chair Elect, the Secretary of the Board, the Chairperson of the Finance Committee, an At Large Board member, the Public Relations Coordinator, the Publications Manager, and the Volunteer Coordinator.

Finance Committee is composed of at least 2 members of the Board of Directors. In practice, we also like to have at least 3 members of NSN serve on this committee. The Finance Committee is charged with making recommendations about expenditures and income. The Finance Committee works closely with Corporate Treasurer Bob Johnson. Generally, the Finance Committee meets quarterly. Members of the Finance Committee (together with members of the Fundraising Committee) solicit funds from the membership and others to sponsor the cost of the printed program for the annual conference.

Oracle Awards Committee is composed of at least 3 NSN members and is charged with reviewing nominations and choosing awards annually. Nominations are submitted online, beginning in early November. Nominations close in early March. Committee members notify those selected for the Oracle Awards and assist with planning the awards ceremony for the annual conference.

Grants Committee is composed of at least 3 NSN members and is charged with reviewing, awarding grants, and overseeing the Sponsored Member Program. The Sponsored Member Program enables NSN's individual, associate, and affiliate group members to apply for funds under its non-profit umbrella and thus makes new sources of funding available to them. NSN fiscal sponsorship complies with IRS regulations for donations by foundations and corporations, and enables individual donors to direct their contributions to a non-profit organization and receive a tax deduction while supporting storytelling projects. Furthermore, members of the Sponsored Member Program (SMP) can receive assistance from the Grants Committee in preparing their proposals for outside funding. We will make sure that every proposal NSN sponsors is of high quality. For a full description of the SMP program go to
https://storynet.org/membership/benefits/sponsored-member/

By-Laws Committee is composed of at least 3 NSN members and charged with reviewing the Bylaws annually and recommending amendments to be considered by the NSN Board. According to the Bylaws, all changes must be provided to the NSN Board in writing, 30 days prior to the Board meeting at which they will be voted on. A two thirds majority vote of the Board members in office is required for changes to pass.

Fundraising Committee is composed of one NSN board member and 2 NSN members and is charged with designing fundraising efforts. In practice, members of the Fundraising Committee have been meeting with the Finance Committee on a regular basis to develop fundraising initiatives.

Membership Committee is composed of one NSN Board member and 2 NSN members and is charged with recruiting new members. The Membership Committee makes recommendations to the board about public relations efforts to attract new members.

Events Committee is composed of one NSN Board members and 2 NSN members and is charged with proposing and planning events sponsored by NSN. These events may be virtual or in-person events designed to support NSN's mission.

Newsletter Committee is composed of one board member and at least 3 NSN members charged with producing the monthly NSN e-newsletter. Current positions on the committee include Managing Editor, Assistant Managing Editor, Events Editor, and Copy Editors. The deadline for submitting content for the newsletter is the 25th of each month with distribution to the membership via email on the first of each month. Newsletters are posted on the NSN website, as well.

Accreditation Committee is composed of at least 3 NSN members and is charged with evaluating storyteller and storytelling organizations that offer non-degree instructions of accreditation. Storytelling educators actively seek accreditation and the National Storytelling Network has answered this need. The purpose of this accreditation process is not to require instructional standards or outcomes, but to determine if providers are indeed doing what they claim. The process is different than certification for performance of standards and different than coursework for academic credit. The review process is implemented by established storytellers who have experience in storytelling instruction. The process enriches and promotes the programs that are reviewed and helps to form a valuable resource for our membership and others when deciding on storytelling education. Because the NSN Accreditation is self-sustaining, there is an application fee of $350.00. This fee is used to reimburse professional storytellers who review the application and to pay for supplies, postage, and the certificate.

Conference Committee is directed by the Vice-Chair and a local representative of the hosting site. The committee includes one representative from each SIG, the NSN Finance Committee Chair, and at least two representatives from the local group hosting the event. The duration of membership on this committee ends when the final report of the conference is submitted to the NSN Board. This committee is reconstituted whenever an NSN conference is planned. Duties include evaluating proposals (with input from the SIGS) and making recommendations about acceptance and non-acceptance.

Strategic Planning Committee is composed of one Executive Committee member, two NSN board members (including a SIG representative, 2 NSN members and one

external expert. Because this is a new committee, the description of duties is still being developed. The Strategic Planning Committee is designed to fine tune the organization and clearly define its mission and purpose.

General Timelines to Follow

To assist new NSN Board members in carrying out their responsibilities, this timeline for various activities is provided as a guide. More specific guidelines are available from those who are currently or recently completed those tasks. It is recommended that new committee chairs consult with the previous chairs about specific timelines and procedures to follow.

NSN Newsletter Deadlines—Content for the monthly e-newsletter is the 25th of the month, with distribution set for the 1st of each month.

Tellabration—NSN recommends sponsoring organizations choose an appropriate date in the month of November to host their Tellabration event. To advertise the event through NSN's email distribution and social media, all promotional materials are due at least one month prior to the event. The Tellabration guide is available at https://storynet.org/events/tellabration/ (Membership Area)

Oracle Award Nominations open in November and close in early March. Check the website for exact dates. (The committee has usually coordinated the opening of Nominations with the autumnal equinox and the close of Nominations with the vernal equinox.) Nomination materials are available at https://storynet.org/awards/oracle-awards/ (Membership Area). Once the award winners are selected (usually by the end of March), acceptance notices are sent out. Presenters and recipients are asked to participate in the awards ceremony (about 2 months prior to conference) and at conference, they are expected to attend a brief walk through in the performance venue.

Annual Conference—Detailed timelines are available from the previous year's committee chairs. Generally, plans for hosting a conference begin in early spring a year before the conference date with locating a local storytelling organization that is willing to host the conference. The hosting organization is charged with finding a venue and announcing where the conference will be held during that year's the membership meeting at the annual conference. Contracts with the venue are approved and signed by NSN Treasurer and Bookkeeper. The Conference Committee puts together a budget for the conference and submits it to the NSN Board in early fall. Calls for proposals go out with submission deadlines being in late November or early December. Acceptance notices are sent out in late December. Early Bird Registration for the conference begins in late January and runs through late May 31 or six weeks before the conference date. The Printed Program is compiled and published one month prior to conference. The conference is usually scheduled for mid-July. The planning committee submits a report to the NSN Board following the conference.

Nominating Committee—should have recommendations for the candidate running for Vice Chair Elect by early spring. The election for this board member takes place at the general membership meeting that is held during the annual conference

NSN Publications
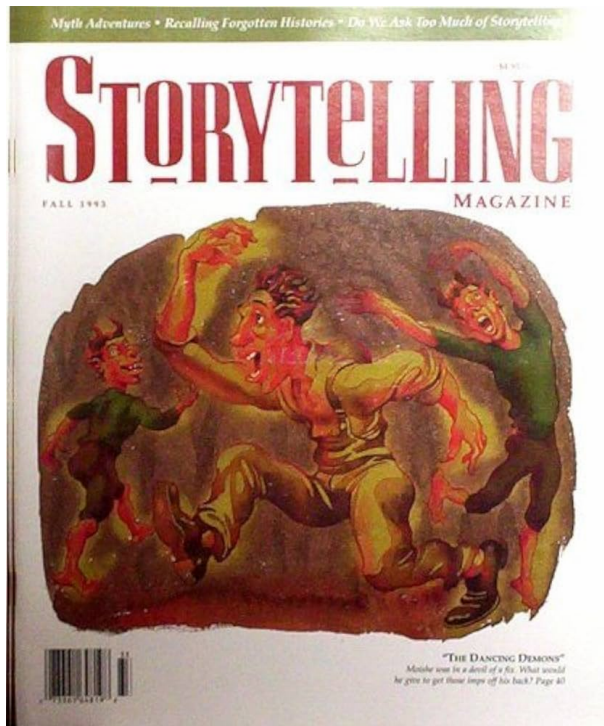
From 1980 through March 2020, Storytelling magazine was produced by NSA/NSN. Because of financial concerns, the publication ceased in 2020. This award-winning magazine emphasized the diversity in storytelling in genre and cultural background. To access digital copies of some of the issues, go to https://storynet.org/members-only/publications-members-only/ in the Members Area.

Story Beast Online Publication

Beginning in July 2022, the *Story Beast* was launched as an online magazine. *THE STORY BEAST (TSB)* is an independent entity and not affiliated with NSN. TSB is made up of volunteers who have a love of stories and are dedicated to supporting and building the worldwide storytelling community. TSB comes out quarterly in connection with the Seasons/Equinoxes/Solstices on the 15th of the following months and themes: such as March (Stepping Stones), June (Chaotic Creations), September (Flavored Fright), December (Whirling Winds). When it was kicked off on July 15, 2022, the publication was monthly from July-November and then transitioned to this quarterly way to add exciting multimedia experiences with blog and vlog posts, videos, and single articles and stories. To access issues of TSB, go to https://storybeast.org/

Navigating NSN's Website

One of our main ways of reaching the public is through the NSN website, particularly the Members Area:

View/Edit Profile	Membership History	Member Directory	Member Benefits
NSN Board Meetings	TELLABRATION!	ORACLE Awards	Member Awards
ABC-CLIO Greenwood Folklore Database	Storytelling Magazine Archives	JJ Reneaux Award at Artists Standing Strong Together	

You will see the following options once you log in as an NSN Member and navigate to the Members Area. (Please note that links for both Tellabration! and the ORACLE awards are reachable from the main menu under *Events*)

Please note that you will always find the Zoom link for monthly NSN Board meetings under the NSN Board Meetings tab.

Upcoming NSN Board Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, August 20th at 6:00 pm Central Time**. No registration is required. Please click the button below to join the online meeting.

Click Here to Join the Board Meeting

Click Here for July 20th Minutes – Not Available

If you would like copies of the meeting minutes from prior Board meetings, please email: info@storynet.org

Click Here for NSN Bylaws

Click Here for Minutes of 2024 Membership Meeting – July 13th

Photo courtesy of Angela Lloyd

This is where board meeting minutes are posted and where you can access a copy of the Bylaws.

Conflict of Interest Policy

Currently, the NSN Board is considering a revision to the current Conflict of Interest Policy. However, the following statement encapsulates the focus of such a policy:

No board member may receive a grant, award, or be selected for performance or presentation while serving on a committee that selects those grants, awards, performance/presentation slots.