

**UPAA Board Meeting
Annual Business Meeting
Minutes
July 17, 2025**

MEETING INFORMATION:

Date: 7/17/25

Time: 12:00-2:00 p.m. EST

Duration: 120 minutes

Location: University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Meeting Type: In-person

Board Members Present:

Cydney Scott (President), Mark Carriveau (Vice President), Lyndsie Schlink, Jason Halley (Secretary), Derek Eckenroth, Nate Edwards, Kristen Grace (Treasurer), and Jeff Fitlow.

Call to Order (12:29 p.m.)

President Cydney Scott called the meeting to order at 12:29 p.m. and welcomed the membership. She explained that the annual business meeting provides a transparent look at the state of the organization and a forum for member questions. Cydney introduced the Board of Directors, noting that the board consists of eight directors serving staggered four-year terms, with two seats up for election each year. She outlined officer responsibilities and announced that Nate Edwards had been appointed Treasurer. Scott also described the board's regular cadence—monthly 90-minute Zoom meetings with additional coordination via Slack and email—and the annual fall site visit where the board meets in person to plan with the next symposium host.

State of UPAA (12:33 p.m.)

Scott reported that the constitution and by-laws updates approved shortly before the symposium are now in effect. These changes include clarifying the fiscal year, modernizing award names, and expanding membership definitions. Notably, video members are now eligible for full membership and may stand for election to the board. Scott emphasized that these revisions are meant to make the association more inclusive and reflect the diversity of creative roles represented in UPAA.

Committee and Officer Reports (from 12:35 p.m.)

Lyndsie Schlink delivered the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion update. She described ongoing outreach to women's colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities to broaden and diversify the membership. Schlink is also scoping a mentorship program that would match members with five or fewer years of experience to mentors with ten or more years; interested mentors and mentees are encouraged to contact her directly. In addition, the Bill & Amy

Fellowship will be expanded to support more recipients and to help cover memberships for individuals at smaller or under-resourced schools; a donation option will be added to the website to facilitate personal contributions.

Reporting on finances, Scott confirmed that the FY25 financial report had been emailed to members in advance. She highlighted the organization's cost savings from retiring the printed *Contact Sheet* and invited feedback on preferred ways to continue sharing that content, whether via the blog, a downloadable PDF, or another digital format. The board travel fund, budgeted at \$3,000, has provided approximately \$1,775 to help directors whose institutions cannot fully support travel to mid-year and planning meetings. The association will also cancel its QuickBooks Online subscription, saving roughly \$60 per month. Symposium expenses continue to be covered by registration fees, and any surplus is directed to the Speaker Fund.

Derek Eckenroth reported that a recent website issue related to expiring domain or account settings has been resolved. To prevent recurrences, the team will implement a longer grace period for renewals. Eckenroth and Jason Halley were thanked for late-night troubleshooting that ensured members could submit B&H Shootout entries after upload problems emerged. Kristen Grace, with support from Amanda Pitts, shared that approximately 18 corporate member companies were represented on site this year with about 30 individual attendees. Corporate partners continue to underwrite events and prizes and to serve as constructive thought partners; the board will maintain regular check-ins with partner representatives to ensure the relationship remains mutually beneficial.

In the Communications report, Jason Halley noted that 62 email campaigns were sent this year with an average open rate of 61 percent. Because UPAA now sends mail through Google Workspace, some university filters flag these emails as spam; members were asked to whitelist UPAA addresses and keep their website profiles up to date. Slack was again used for symposium communications; because the free tier only retains 90 days of history, the board is evaluating alternative community platforms and will solicit member input before committing resources. Halley added that a UPAA podcast was explored but is on hold pending a dedicated lead who can manage production without diluting existing communications. Responding to member concerns, he said the board is working to communicate strategic direction more consistently and will use surveys to shape priorities. A review of competition voting data did not reveal affiliation-based collusion; however, the team did observe instances of anomalously low one-star votes from some consistently high-performing competitors, which leadership is now considering how best to address.

Scott added that the board will conduct a comprehensive survey on competition structure and fairness, recognizing that changes must be deliberate and sustainable for volunteers to carry out well. She announced that the General Features category will be reinstated this contest year with a photojournalism-aligned definition to be drafted and published following member input.

Additional Reports (from 1:02 p.m.)

Nate Edwards outlined the association's near-term survey plan. A symposium evaluation will be sent on Monday, and members were urged to complete it so the board can address successes and pain points with data. A more extensive competition survey will follow to gather perspectives on categories, scoring, clarity, and transparency. Edwards also noted that he can provide filtered survey breakdowns—such as by institution type or gender—upon request to support benchmarking needs.

Monthly Image Competition Chair Jay Ferchaud reported that the MIC regularly draws nearly 300 entries and reminded members that submissions close at 11:59:59 p.m. on the 15th of each month. Edwards then clarified that a work's point total is derived from vote averages rather than simple placement, so a first-place finish in a weakly rated category may receive fewer points than a highly rated image that does not place in a more competitive field.

Depth in Field: UPAA Stories Blog and *Society of Creatives* peer-learning updates were provided by Meredith Forrest Kulwicki. She invited members to contribute stories and especially post-competition reviews, which drive strong readership. The peer-partner pilot concluded with 18 groups and an estimated 80 percent completion rate; the program will reopen for new sign-ups soon.

On social media, Katherine Seghers reported that Instagram has surpassed 900 followers and that initiatives like "Day in the Life" are helping expand reach; members were invited to pitch behind-the-scenes features and other content.

Video Chair Brett Szczepanski thanked the committee and traced the steady growth of video producer engagement, noting 48 registered video members this year with 29 in attendance. Because member breakouts constitute most of the video curriculum, he encouraged more producers to share expertise so the program reflects the full range of roles, team sizes, and skill levels. Szczepanski announced he is stepping down and that the organization is seeking a successor—or co-chairs—who can program inclusively for a broad constituency. He reminded members that serving on the board requires standing for election as a director.

Awards and Honors (from 1:20 p.m.)

Cydney Scott presented this year's recognitions.

- The Board Appreciation Award went to **Wayne Odle**, Creative Director, UIC Creative & Digital Services (University of Illinois Chicago).
- The Chris Hughes Distinguished Service Awards were presented to **Katherine Seghers** and **Amanda Pitts**.
- **Lyndsie Schlink** was named UPAA Fellow.
- **Glenn Carpenter** received a Master of the Profession.
- The President's Award was presented to **Brett Szczepanski**.

Elections and Q&A (1:30–1:39 p.m.)

The chair announced the results of the board elections. Katherine Seghers was elected with the most votes, and Jason Halley was elected as incumbent.

During questions, a member asked how officers are selected. Scott clarified that members elect directors and, once seated, the board elects officers annually based on members' skills and interest. Before closing, Scott reminded everyone to carry UPAA's professional standards into evening social events so that all members feel safe and respected.

2026 Symposium Announcement (1:39 p.m.)

The University of Michigan was announced as the host of the 2026 UPAA Symposium. Additional details will be shared as planning progresses with the host team.

Adjournment (1:41 p.m.)

A motion to adjourn was made by Glenn Carpenter and seconded by Jeff Sabo. The motion carried, and the meeting adjourned at approximately 1:41 p.m.