



Proceedings of the MNA Board of Directors

Thursday, Oct. 23, 2025

Online meeting

Present: President Justin Lessman, Jackson; First Vice President Tara Brandl, Tracy; Second Vice President Kelly Boldan, Willmar; Third Vice President Steve Jameson, Mankato; Treasurer Bill Albrecht, Coon Rapids; Immediate Past President Crystal Miller, Albert Lea; Executive Director Lisa Hills, Director of Development & Communications Lisa Schwarz, MNA; Controller/CFO Laura Wendle, All In One Accounting.

Meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m. by President Justin Lessman who then passed control of the meeting to Brandl.

Minutes of the Aug. 5-6 and Aug. 19, 2025, board meetings were approved unanimously on a **MOTION** by Jameson, second by Miller, after discussion and direction for staff to amend language in the Aug. 19 minutes to reflect a freeze in the MNA dues structure.

MNA financial reports:

MNA September Statement of Activities and balance sheet were reviewed by Wendle. The 2026 budget process will begin in the coming two months. The report was approved unanimously on a **MOTION** by Boldan, second by Albrecht.

June-September 2025 disbursements, staff expense reports and MNA credit card statements were recommended for approval by Brandl and approved unanimously on a **MOTION** by Jameson, second by Boldan.

Executive Director's Report:

Hills reported that the MNA staff is very busy preparing for year-end financial work, the annual audit and the January convention. MNA has captured several new advertising accounts, offsetting dropped accounts to approximately break-even status. Staff is also in the process of moving to ACH payments from the One System to streamline workflows and improve speed of payments to members for advertising placements.

On the policy front, Albrecht, Hills and Emily Peterson of Star Tribune attended the News Media Alliance Washington fly-in Oct. 6-7 and met with representatives from several states, Sen. Amy Klobuchar and the staffs of Reps. Tom Emmer and Kelly Morrison. Albrecht emphasized the need to push for legislative guardrails to protect publishers as AI takes hold. Hills, Lessman and Schwarz attended the National Newspaper Association Convention, which was held in Minneapolis Oct. 9-10.

Dues Task Force Update (members: Lessman, Boldan, Jameson, Albrecht):

- Lessman reported that the task force decided at its August meeting to freeze the MNA dues structure and apply a 4% increase for 2026. He said year-end work will produce a plan ready for board consideration in April, dependent on year-end information to be provided by MNA. Albrecht said he has reviewed mid-year data, which he offered to share with the entire board to illustrate disparities, mainly concerning about 100 members with single

titles. Member rates are much different for single titles versus group ownership titles.

Committee reports:

Fundraising committee (members: Jameson and Albrecht): Tabled to December board meeting.

- Jameson also provided an update on a planned meeting of publishers and general managers during the MNA convention in January and indicated a possible fundraiser at that meeting.

Member Services Committee - Jameson

The committee report was accepted unanimously on a MOTION by Lessman, second by Miller.

- **Applications for MNA membership were reviewed.**

- The Janesville Journal's application for active membership was approved unanimously on a MOTION by Boldan, Second by Albrecht.
- An application for an individual sustaining membership for Clara Ann Bagnoli, a student, was unanimously approved on MOTION by Boldan and second by Brandl.

Journalism Education Committee Report – Boldan

The committee report was accepted unanimously on a MOTION by Jameson, second by Albrecht.

Advertising/Digital Committee report – Brandl

The committee report was accepted unanimously on a MOTION by Albrecht, second by Boldan.

- The committee's request for an appropriation of \$350 to purchase prizes for the Ideas on Tap convention sessions was approved unanimously on a MOTION by Jameson, seconded by Boldan.

Legislative Report – Hills

The public notice law passed last year to provide a stopgap for legal notices when newspapers close will sunset in 2026. Hills said MNA expects a public notice action and is also aware of a proposed change to foreclosure procedures. Similar foreclosures legislation in other states has affected newspapers, but the intent of the Minnesota backers of the legislation is to leave newspapers in Minnesota unaffected. MNA will be carefully monitoring the bill.

The 2024 closures of publications in Scott County caused an "avalanche" of public notice issues. Other newspaper closures have made the public notice situation worse. Legislators are concerned about news coverage in communities, especially if the official legal newspaper is not providing it. Hills said MNA needs to arrive at language that would ensure coverage of the area where the notices are required to be published.

Hills said it has become clear that it is in MNA's best interests to work toward qualifying online-only news websites for legal notices, an effort which will require input and support from the MNA board of directors and MNA members. Pennsylvania has a similar bill that sets a hierarchy prioritizing print, followed by e-editions if no printed newspaper (or online-only converted by a former print newspaper) is available. MNA is also looking to Virginia and Texas for other examples. Hills will share proposed language when it is available from MNA counsel Mark Anfinson. Lessman said MNA will need to convene the Legislative committee for review and input when proposed language is available.

Hills reported that MNA is working with the Press Forward coalition on work to help support local news.

Other business:

- **Convention:** Schwarz reviewed the three-tier registration fee in place for 2026, the Wednesday night reception, and sponsorship packages; asked for session and Friday luncheon speaker ideas. Hills presented an update on BNC entries (over 4,000) and presented criteria for the Distinguished Service to Journalism Award and the Friend of Minnesota Newspapers awards for nominations and discussions at the December board meeting.
- **Policy for dues and ad sales revenue after closures:** Hills asked for direction from the board about whether MNA should refund, pro-rate or retain member dues when a member closes, as well as how to handle outstanding advertising payments. Discussion by the board based on their own business practices resulted in agreement that member dues should not be refunded or pro-rated, and that language to that effect should be included in member dues invoices. Boldan asked Hills to prepare a draft policy for the board to review. Discussion around the return of advertising sales revenue centered on the potential difficulty in finding who to pay, and that it would only apply if they had paid their dues in full. Albrecht pointed out that some states have laws governing the matter and MNA needs to review statutes to determine its legal obligations.
- **Consider name change to Minnesota News Media Association:** Lessman led the discussion, pointing out that MNA has accepted more digital-only members and has magazine members, causing “newspaper” to be inaccurate. Other state associations say similar name changes were well-received by advertising agencies and legislators. Board discussion: Jameson asked if that would open the association to broadcast news; most felt that would be possible. Brandl stated that the industry is changing so much, our members are doing work far beyond newspapers. “Newspapers” tends to shut down discussion with legislators, advertisers and funders, she said. MNA needs to be in the best position possible to serve members and this change could help. Boldan said he had no objection and that we have to change with the times. Miller said that the industry has evolved beyond print but we need to help retain the trust that print still has, and that we have to work together. Albrecht said that, ultimately, the board gets to decide who is admitted to the association. All agreed it is imperative to have member engagement and MNA will need to capitalize on opportunities to talk to members at the convention. MNA bylaws require a vote of the members for a name change. The board recommended that the issue be put on the agenda of the publishers meeting during the convention, then on the annual meeting agenda and directed Lessman, Hills, Schwarz to create an outreach plan.
- **Nominating Committee (members: Lessman, Miller, Koenen):** Lessman reported the committee has identified a handful of MNA board candidates and had spoken with some of them. The deadline to nominate is Oct. 31.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:17 a.m. by unanimous vote on a **MOTION** by Boldan and second by Jameson.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Schwarz

Director of Development & Communications

MNA and MNI quarterly financial reports are available to be reviewed by Active and Associate members in good standing upon request by contacting the MNA Executive Director or any MNA board member.