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Minnesota News Media Institute Board of Directors
11:00 a.m. Thursday, October 15, 2026
MNA/MNI offices, Minneapolis

Present: Tara Brandl, Tracy; Crystal Miller, Albert Lea; Kelly Boldan, Willmar; Ted Almen, Kerkhoven; Doug Hanneman, Hutchinson; Rachel Miller, Henderson; Dominic Papatola, CommunityGiving; MNA Executive Director Lisa Hills; MNA Executive Director-Designate Justin Lessman; MNA Director of Development and Communications Lisa Schwarz, MNA Member Services and Program Manager Laura Niemi

Absent: Tim Douglass, Glenwood; Bill Albrecht, Coon Rapids; Andrew Meuleners, Winsted

Welcome, introductions and call to order: Brandl, filling in for former Chair Lessman, called the meeting to order at 11:06 a.m.

Introduction of new MNI Board member, Dominic Papatola. Papatola is the chief impact officer at CommunityGiving; he oversees all of the programmatic work of the organization, along with supporting the partner community foundations to find new and innovative ways to create impact on a local level. He's worked with communities and nonprofits across Minnesota and North Dakota. Before his career in philanthropy, he was a journalist for more than 20 years, writing for the Duluth News-Tribune, the St. Paul Pioneer Press, Minnesota Public Radio and other media organizations.

Presentation of the previous meeting minutes: MOTION by Almen to approve April 16, 2026, and August MNI Board meeting minutes. With a second from Boldan, the motion passed unanimously.

MNI Financial Reports.

Boldan presented the Q326 financial statements, noting financial decline due to investments, no CJU expenses and MNA management fee increasing from $4,000 to $5,000. After review, a **MOTION** was made by C. Miller with a second from Almen to approve the financial statements from July to September 2026. Passed unanimously.

Reviewed Q2-Q3 MNI donation and fiscal sponsorship report. Schwarz reported MNI has two new fiscal sponsorships for Herald Journal Publishing and Swift County Monitor. Tracy Area Headlight-Herald has $5,000 in an account and the Paynesville Press has $15,000 for its transition to non-profit status. The Ely Timberjay has closed its fund. There have been two additional inquiries from the Albert Lea Tribune and Grant County Herald. MNI online donations go directly to MNI and into a restricted fund and are paid 8 percent on distribution.

Accounting discrepancy was found that roundup funds have been going to MNA instead of MNI since 2002. This has been corrected.

Hanneman suggests setting up Newspaper in Education as a fiscal sponsorship.

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Emphasis was placed on setting up fiscal sponsorships before they are needed. Recommended MNI provide – for a fee – website setup.

Local News Giving Day Report: Total of $4,095 collected for 11 newspapers. This netted $1,425 for MNI. Waiting to be notified if this campaign will be done again.

Program Reports

2026 Internship Program: Niemi reported 10 newspapers were awarded $1,000 subsidies. All 10 met the minimum requirements to receive the full $1,000. A survey was conducted for both the supervisor and the students and available to committee members.

Online Media Campus has had 81 webinars viewed so far in 2026. This is a service provided to members, paid for by the Board at the rate of $1,500 per year but no charge to members. Individual webinars would normally cost $35 apiece.

Citizen Journalism University (CJU) was canceled for Fall 2026. Attendance did not reach the 12-student minimum. After discussion, a **MOTION** was made by Boldan with a second from Almen to have the Board approve the session move to a winter schedule (February-March) timeline to possibly improve attendance, if instructors are available. Passed unanimously.

Convention Report:

Student Award Winners: Suggested plan to provide a "Job Board" at the convention, gift bags with MNA promotional items, etc. Students will have colored name tags to help identify and Committee and Board members will be encouraged to greet the students.

BNC College: 193 entries (20 more than last year). Professional: 3,314 entries (678 less than last year).

Silent Auction: About 20 items so far. Last year we had about 55 items to bid on. Board is asked to bring silent auction items to the December (3) BOD meeting if at all possible. Earlier the better to assist staff in processing.

Sponsorship and Trade Show: Two sponsors secured to date. Ask for Board to help solicit sponsors. There is a sponsorship geared toward those who don't want a booth but want to support MNI; it is the MNI Gold Sponsorship.

Funding Committee Report:

Current members are Andrew Meuleners, Tara Brandl and Robert Hopwood, with Schwarz as the MNA/MNI staff liaison. Will be seeking additional committee members. Financial goal has been set, with a revenue target for inclusion in the 2027 MNI budget of $10,000. Focus to include developing more non-member donations.

Some upcoming ideas/plans for fundraising:

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- Golf tournament that rotates around the state (open to anyone); $40-50 person / $200 a foursome.
    - Incorporate food trucks for a percentage
- Wheelborrow of wine (or something similar) at Convention / BOD member – Bill Albrecht
- Swag bags (vendor paid) for convention
- Organize a speakers bureau to get the word out
- Focus on targeting significant funders, foundations, etc.

C. Miller made a **MOTION** to accept the Funding Committee Report with a second from Boldan. Motion passed unanimously

New Business

Schwarz reported that Give to the Max Day / Giving Tuesday is scheduled for November 19 with early giving opening on November 1.

Adjourn

Brandl called for the meeting to adjourn at 12:26 p.m. The **MOTION** was presented by Boldan with a second from R. Miller. Passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Niemi
MNA Member Service and Program Manager

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