

The Communications Team 2019-2020 Annual Report

1) Mission Statement

When the Communications Team was established, two Chapters ago, there was not a lot of clarity about mission and purpose. However, with the on-going interaction of the team members representing such OEF functions as Fiddlesticks, the web site, our treasurer, members who participate in the Formation and Fellowship teams, and members with prior life expertise in communications, we eventually began to create a shared broader perspective of what our team needed to be about. As a result, the team drafted a charter / mission statement to describe our scope and activities. This was shared with the Council.

It is not clear from our reading of the OEF Statutes what if any process is required to approve the mission statement.

2) Data Privacy and Protection

Last year the Communications Team made a proposal calling for the establishment of an OEF policy stating that the OEF seeks compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Having such a policy sets in place a number of compliance requirements (and solutions) for the OEF handling of data. These can then be addressed more efficiently (i.e. less analysis and debate) because we would be working off an existing body of internationally approved best practice.

GDPR is an EU law and the OEF does currently have 3 European members. There is also legislations similar to GDPR which covers our siblings in NZ and other countries. The US has been going through a period regulatory aversion, so it currently lags behind the rest of the world in consumer protection. However, it is approaching the issues addressed by GDPR standards through a piecemeal approach with local legislation like California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA).

Since our OEF web site has member contact information and financial transactions, lack of a GDPR policy puts the OEF in non-compliance with the EU and could cause it to be blocked from non-US access.

The Communications Team views this much more as an ethical, rather than a legal compliance issue. Given who we are, why would the OEF not seek the to comply with the highest level of implemented international standards when it comes to data protection and privacy.

The Communications Team submitted a proposal to this effect with last year's report. The then Council took no action and it the matter was not brought up at Chapter. This year the the Communications Team reminded the current Council of the lack of movement. The Council's direction was to request a detailed implementation plan from the Communications Team before they could take a policy stand. There seems to be a concern in the Council about OEF liability in taking a general stand on adopting GDPR compliance.

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The Communications Team would prefer that the OEF would address this from the top down by the OEF first officially adopting a goal of GDPR compliance which could then be realised incrementally by on-going detailed implementation work.

While the Communications Team felt that it has the skills to distill the GDPR issue and offer “best practice” advice, it also feels that such a broad policy concerning an OEF position on a matter of values is not the purview of the Communications Team. It was unclear from our reading of the OEF Statutes if the adoption of such a policy on behalf of the OEF is actually within the Council’s purview or if it falls within the description of Chapter Business and belongs to the order as a whole.

3) OEF Member Data Accuracy

One of the original drivers for the establishment of the Communications Team was the need to reconcile our different source of data concerning information about our siblings and “friends”. We encountered two major difficulties which hindered our progress. The analysis of our OEF data model requires a specific technical discipline found within the IT profession. We were fortunate to have a certain amount of that skill within the Communications Team. However, the size of the task in relation to the available time of our trained members was not favourable.

We also had a setback we we had earlier received information that the OEF would be sunsetting Wild Apricot. The Communications Committee had been seriously looking at using the Wild Apricot platform as the basis for an accurate master of OEF member data. Unfortunate the subsequent decision to retain Wild Apricot was never communicated to the Communications Team and during that latency, the Communication Team’s effort on this topic lost its momentum.

This is a topic that the Communications Team will revisit in the coming year.

4) Technology Donations

Expenses are always a consideration for the OEF and our Communications tool choices are generally limited to low cost and no cost. The Communications Team was able to determine that there is a clearing house for receiving free and discounted IT products and services from major technology companies. The clearing house is called TechSoup and the OEF is now officially registered as an eligible not-for-profit. Until directed otherwise, the Communications Committee is managing the administrative process for access to the service.

5) Collaboration Platform Pilot

As the Communications Team was assessing the current inventory of OEF communication methods, we also began to look at current industry trends and where they might be leading us. For example, new technologies like virtual reality (VR) are already ubiquitous among young people in the computer gaming space. Yet that same technology has now spread into unlikely areas such as VR Church. We were also finding that our current set of labels of things like “social networking” were no longer matching the evolution of the technology, nor were they matching the productisation of that technology into consumable services.

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Then suddenly came COVID-19 and a tremendous push of acceptance of virtualisation. Hospital visits, music lessons, psychotherapy sessions, chaplain pastoral visits, church services, all began to be routinely accepted on-line, even by segments of the population who would have been considered resistant. We were also seeing a trend where the post-COVID-19 “new normal” retains significant virtualisation capabilities, across the board, being integrated with physical presence in a hybrid fashion.

Our takeaway from all of this has been that the Communications Team needs to look at all of our OEF communication and social networking with collaboration in mind - i.e. how useful are our tools and approaches in building relationships within our community and between our community and the public. With all of that in mind, the Communications Team was presented with the opportunity, at no cost (see our report item on Technology Donations), to obtain access to a state-of-the-art commercial collaboration tool. The tool is called Workplace and it currently has over 5 million paid users (at approximately \$6/person/month). Although Workplace-for-Good provides not-for-profits like the OEF with free usage, we reference the typical price to indicate the commercial value of this type of capability in the marketplace. Workplace is part of an even much larger and rapidly growing collaboration market sector that it shares with other products like Slack and Microsoft Teams.

Our OEF pilot has been exploring the use of the tool as means of facilitating the conducting of routine OEF business (the Communications, Formation, and Fellowship teams are participating in the pilot). The pilot is also looking at the use of the tool to facilitate unstructured and semi-structured interactions between siblings. Unstructured activities are things like our personal status updates on tools like Marco Polo and posts on the OEF List Serve. Semi-structured interactions would include activities like our regional fellowship events and activities like our Bible studies.

We expect to have an evaluation of the pilot completed during August. The evaluation will include lessons learned and recommendations. The OEF process for approval of any of those recommendations (i.e. roles of Communications Team, Council, Chapter) is currently an open item to be explored by the Communications Team with the Council.