

## Director Q&A

Questions submitted will be posted here once one or more responses from the candidates have been received. Candidate responses will be posted in the order they are received. Until a candidate has submitted a response to a specific question, their name will not appear in the "[Candidate] Responds" section of the Q&A.

To see the candidates for Director:

- [Bernard Aschwanden](#)
- [Ray Gallon](#)
- [Li-At Ruttenberg](#)

To see the posted questions and answers for each position:su

- [Director](#)
- [Secretary](#)
- [Nominating Committee](#)

**Q. 1: The Board has a policy of speaking as one, regardless of any final vote. Although STC is not a democracy, are you in favor of allowing individual directors to openly discuss dissenting opinions with members? If so, what will you do to encourage this shift toward transparency? If not, what is your rationale for maintaining the status quo? - Suzanne Guess**

**Bernard Aschwanden Responds:**

The STC is a democracy in a few ways. You get to vote for your representatives and the board votes as individuals, but the result is considered a single voice. We, as candidates, are asked what we would do in the case of a decision that goes against our own belief, and the expectation is that we speak as one voice after the vote. Personally I've found that I will take a position and hope to convince others of my position being correct. I'm fine with not being able to convince everyone, and hope that they can put forward an intelligent argument as well. If that sways me, then they likely have better logic or reasons than I do.

All that being said, if the decision is one that I very truly feel is the "wrong" approach then I would work to get the next round of elections decided in favor of people who would vote more in-line with my belief and hope to change the decision. I don't know what actually CAN be done to make it more transparent, but perhaps a system that shows the net result of a vote, without representation of who voted in what way is a start. That is, to show a motion pass is one thing, but to show that it passed with 100% support, 80%, or 55% really can speak volumes. It may provide a better idea of the leanings of the board.

My completely personal opinion is to allow each board member the option to talk to members, community leaders, and even people outside the STC when it makes sense (to get another view point on finances for example, I may ask my accountant) and express our view on issues that we are asked to vote on. This wouldn't be a requirement, but an option. Again, this is my own opinion without a full understanding (yet) of how it would be implemented. However, these discussions would inform us of the views of the membership and help form decisions. It would also be interesting to see an open list of "benefit/drawback" that is considered by the board before voting. Compile it based on discussions, again, in a neutral way, but give everyone an idea of the things that are/were discussed. It may help to explain why a vote went the way that it did.

Lastly, there is a need for people in a leadership role to make a decision in these cases. It may not be the popular decision, but I hope it is the right one. As an abstract, if put to a vote, I'm sure many of us would think that a big order of wings, fried chicken, steaks, burgers, and a big cold beer or a mix drink, followed by a huge slab of chocolate cheesecake are a more interesting meal than pasta and sauce, a garden salad (dressing on the side), and milk or juice.

However, the right decision is to eat a balanced and healthy meal. It's not the one we truly want every time we go out, and at times we can deviate from the healthy track, but there aren't a lot of people who would say the more popular choice is the right choice.

Leadership requires listening, discussion, thought, and the ability to make the right choices. It also means that the wrong choices may be made, so it requires the ability to admit to errors and learn from them. That combination is what the board needs. If the status quo is unable to do this, then it should be changed by the collective will of the membership. One of the best ways is to ask the candidates direct questions in every election and use the information you collect to inform your decision on how to vote.

### **Ray Gallon Responds:**

There are two kinds of discussions in a board of directors. The first type of discussion is normal debate on various issues, where the to and fro of opinion contributes to making good decisions that gain consensus. In my view, a resumé of the various arguments preceding a vote by the board on such issues should be published in the membership area of the STC web site following every board meeting. Board members who dissented on a vote should be able to speak on their opinions, using a formula such as, "Speaking for myself, and not for the board, I believe that..." Such statements must avoid attacking other board members or the board itself. A dissenting opinion has to be expressed from the point of view of a board member who must also be able to continue working with other board members, and respect for others and for the decision of the board is primordial.

The second type of board discussion is the "executive session." This is where sensitive matters are discussed. There are issues where the details cannot be revealed to members, because of their delicate nature. These should be kept to a minimum. Executive session should be the exception. When decisions are taken in executive session, no one on the board should express further opinions or give details of discussions, beyond the official board statements. This applies to people in favor of the vote, as well as those against it.

Finally, the "one voice" principle must continue to apply, even with somewhat enhanced liberty

of individual dissent. I believe such freedom must be tempered by respect for the fact that the board is the governing body of the society, and that expressions of great dissension inside this governing body are harmful to the society. If a board member finds a board decision morally or ethically repugnant, that person should resign from the board before exposing any violent opinions.

### **Li-At Ruttenberg Responds:**

I am open to changing the policy if we need to. I am interested in first learning more about the possible obstacles the current policy brings. Please send me a message through my MySTC or LinkedIn account if you want to discuss this further. (I will forward our conversation to the elections manager if I am required to do so during this campaign.)

In the meantime, I will say this: I agree that the Board must speak as one after a decision is made. But I don't think this means the subject necessarily needs to be a closed subject after a vote, and I think it's imperative that members continue to voice dissenting opinions.

As far as transparency, I think the Board needs to make more efforts to be so. Upset members would feel less upset if they knew the rationale behind decisions. I also think that more transparency would lead to more suggestions from members, which would result in the Board considering solutions it would not otherwise. A concrete and easy way this can occur is with an online forum, one in which members could ask the Board questions or bring suggestions. The STC Notebook is a start, but it's not a forum in which conversations can begin on the members' side (members can only comment on topics introduced by the Society). A public forum in which members introduce topics would lead the Society to address the specific concerns on members' minds. Not only would this make the Society more transparent, it could focus the Board's energies on the topics most relevant to members—which would, hopefully, result in increasing members' perceived value.

**Q. 2: What will you do to bring member dues in line, end the nickel and diming for every resource, and steer STC toward serving its members and the profession instead of building an empire? - Dennis Camilleri**

**Bernard Aschwanden Responds:**

Great question on dues. I'd like to see a clear map of the future of dues. If they are going up, then let's be upfront about it. As an example, it would be great if there was a clear 3 or 4 or 5 year statement on membership dues that ID's the type of membership, the costs this year, next, and for a few years to come.

It may state something like this simple version:

2012: Classic, base price, \$215 Gold \$395

2013: Classic, base price, \$225 Gold \$395

2014: Classic, base price, \$250 Gold \$425

Then you can plan. However, I'd like to know WHY the dues are going up. I compare it with taxes. I have no issue paying fair taxes, and if a politician ever ran and said "yup, we're raising them, but 5%, and here is sound logic as to why" and then explained that the fees will be used for specific reasons that make sense, I'd vote for them.

The same idea with dues. I'd like to see a very simple model that lets me plan for the ways I see membership being of use. Currently I am in the classic membership model. I have no chapter

affiliation, no SIG's. In the past I've had gold membership, but as I'm running I didn't want a specific affiliation. I do like the idea of the option to add chapters and SIG's, but agree that there are issues with too many options on the menu at times.

I don't have the right answer here. What I'd like to ask you to do is provide me (and others) with a suggestion. I'd also really like to ID how the Board can work to make local communities into areas that are well financed, but aren't hoarding cash. There must be a sane way to work together. We've done it with some of our Canadian communities. They work together to run a competition and then share the revenues fairly. The larger community often offers to pick up the direct costs, and everyone wins. We can run competitions, smaller communities don't scramble to find judges, and everyone can bank a bit of money at the end of the process. No one gets rich, but everyone gets what they hope for. Members get a competition, communities get some revenue, and the STC looks good for offering to manage the judging and running the event.

Who else has suggestion on what has worked? I'm open to ideas.

### **Ray Gallon Responds:**

The question says, "What will you do to bring member dues in line..." A director is not an executive. I, alone, as director, cannot "do" anything. What I can do, is work with fellow directors to provide clear value to members. I'd like to reframe this into two questions:

**Are STC dues too high?** I was asked this question a few months ago, and my instinctive, gut reaction was "yes." But then, I said to the person asking, "Actually, if you look at the amount of money we pay, it's not excessive for an international professional association. The problem is, we don't deliver enough for it." That's my position on the question.

**What should we be delivering for our dues?** To start with, STC needs to build on its work with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in other jurisdictions. The objective is to build visibility and respect for the profession of technical communicator in worldwide forums. STC has

members in 50 countries, we need to be as successful in other countries as we have been in one - the United States. Not only that, but we need to build a global profile, such that other technical communications organizations actually look to STC to take the lead, to give guidance, when it comes to furthering the profession.

In the original question, the reference to "nickel and diming" seems to refer, most especially, to webinars. In my view, these need to be free to members, just like the magazines. The argument that a lower fee for members is a benefit doesn't work in an era where there are hundreds of valuable, free webinars available to anyone on the web, some of them of equal or higher quality than the ones we offer. This goes for other "paid" services.

This lead inevitably to the conclusion that we also need to examine our business model, and adapt it to the virtual age, the age of social networks. We need to find new sources of revenue, and provide more services to members. These new services, however, cannot be an excuse for extracting more revenue from members.

Do I have a quick and ready answer? No, I don't. But I know that we have to avoid the mistake made by the music industry, of insisting on maintaining a business model simply because it has worked well in the past. Our job - and it will be mine if I'm elected - is to find a business model for the future. To do that, we need to do research, to see what other professional organizations are doing, and to apply our creativity. Much of the creativity in our society comes from the communities, and I believe that many of the communities in STC have lessons for us at the international level. My view is, in searching for the new business model, we should also consult widely with community leaders and members to understand what constitutes value in this new world.

### **Li-At Ruttenberg Responds:**

I have several ideas for STC to consider. Here are some:

- **Re-include in the annual membership an affiliation with a community, or perhaps two affiliations—a chapter and a SIG, two chapters, or two SIGs—all at one, inclusive, rate.** Members could continue purchasing additional affiliations, but re-including some

community affiliation in the default membership would directly reduce the notion of “nickel and diming members.”

I must admit: I don't know much about the push to have an STC-level-only membership. I welcome more information about the reasoning behind it. As it stands now, I think this splinters our Society, and it devalues “Classic” membership. Furthermore, I think it leads to some confusion in what is and what isn't included in STC-level membership. Just last week, someone wrote to me, “...if we never had [chapter] meetings, I wouldn't join STC just for the various benefits from the web page. I think one of the major benefits is the [chapter] meetings/presentations. But it seems to me that these presentations are part of what I 'purchased' by joining STC.” Unfortunately, the current model makes this specifically not the case. This member, who rejoined STC but did not affiliate with a local chapter, will derive benefits from the local chapter—but the local chapter will not receive funding that accounts for this person. This ties our hands at the community level. In the long run (if not now), this will result in fewer and fewer in-person networking opportunities for this STC member and for chapter members.

- **Pass on to chapters and SIGs almost the entire amount that STC receives for community-level membership dues.** My reasoning for this is two-fold:

o As a member, I expect my chosen community to use these dues to provide services while minimizing further expenses on my end. For example, a chapter can use this money to subsidize part of my meal at a dinner meeting or pay a stipend to a presenter.

o As a community leader, I need this funding to provide actual value to my members. I understand that, for example, a chapter can hold webinars, meet at the library, and so on. But I don't think this is all that a chapter should do.

- **Change the STC Summit model.** We can reduce cost and simultaneously increase attendance by converting the conference into one that's composed of webinar training sessions and face-to-face networking opportunities.



I've heard more than one person say that, even though the training sessions are terrific, they derive most of the conference value from networking between sessions. We should take advantage of webinar technology, and even online classroom environments, for the training. Summit@aClick is a great start, but I'm referring to the real-time, live, training sessions. We could do this by either holding a slew of webinars all on the same days—maybe a week or a month before the face-to-face component—or we could offer a “Summit tract” that would present webinars throughout the year. (We could also offer a separate tract for the pre-conference sessions that occur now.)

As for the face-to-face networking, it could take place over a shorter period of time than the current Summit—maybe even over just a weekend. There would be structure to the events, and maybe even some presentations, but the bulk of the time would be spent in conversations. An added advantage to this delayed networking is that attendees could schedule meetings ahead of time with people they met in their online sessions.

- **Continue finding ways to reduce the Society's overhead costs.** I know a lot of changes have already occurred, but we need to consider going further.

- o Conduct day-to-day STC Headquarters business remotely. That is, eliminate, or grossly reduce, the physical office by making most interactions virtual.

This may not seem practical at the moment, but I think we should pursue this idea. Not only would we save overhead costs, but we would serve as a role model for this sort of progressive work environment.

- o When hiring future STC Headquarters staff, expand the search globally. If we have a virtual Headquarters office, we can hire staff all over the globe.

In places where the going rate is lower than in Virginia, U.S., this might help reduce overhead costs. But I think STC should pursue this even if qualified candidates live in areas where the

going rate is higher than in Virginia, U.S. I think true global diversity throughout the organization, including at the staff level, would naturally lead to a more globally aware Society. My hope is that this would translate to more globally relevant benefits, or perhaps to regionally tweaked benefits that more fully meet the requirements of each region (thereby more fully “serving its members”).

NOTE: This is not “off-shoring,” because STC is not a company and because STC is supposed to traverse country boundaries.

These ideas are most certainly works in progress; I invite further discussion towards shaping them.

**Q. 3: STC calls itself an international society, but it's based in the U.S. and is often accused of being U.S.-centric. What's the best role for STC in the international marketplace? Should there be a strong STC presence in each country? Should STC partner with existing societies (like tekomp)? Something else? - Larry Kunz**

**Bernard Aschwanden Responds:**

My personal take on this is that the STC should represent the membership it has, and grow new member interest. Where this comes from though is to be seen. I'll try to address each question below, and will likely go off on a tangent at least once.

The best role in the international marketplace might be as an organization that is based in North America (where the bulk of members are) and in India (where there is a lot of growth in technical communications). With communities in Europe (and in Canada, and the US) that are smaller and have members spread out, there may need to be a different role. I've talked to many community leaders, some with larger (200+ members) bases to work with, and some with smaller ones. Something that a few have done, and that I'm working to encourage, is to change their model. We should take care of people who want to be in the STC, and we can do it using modern technology. For example, though a mix of email, shared documents, phone conferences, and video/computer sharing, there could be a "virtual community" that represents a geographic region. SO, from an international level, there could be an organization in Canada that looks after the logistics and provides a President, VP, etc. These people could be spread out over thousands of miles, but still work together to manage events. In turn they draw on a wide group of volunteers to help co-ordinate events. This means a community with only 20 or 30 members could operate in one area, a group of 12 in another, and a group of 43 in a third location. That's between, say, 70 and 80 people. Currently that may be three communities, but in the future it could be seen as one, with several locations. One set of leadership but several areas represented. This would help to keep communities active, but reduces the volunteer burden. Lastly, I think that the STC can talk to each community and find best practices to share with all. We are a community of thousands, but each community seems to often "reinvent the wheel" in moving forward. There must be a way for local leaders to learn best practices, and that may be part of the role for the STC on an international level. Find support, learn best practices, and help to implement it at a local level.

As for a strong presence in each country, I don't think this is realistic. We don't have a strong presence in every state in the USA, or every province in Canada. Some are too small to support a community with all the roles (President etc.) and others don't have a large enough corporate base to draw on, or the funds to maintain meetings, or the collective willpower to do the paperwork required. The same can be said for some countries. However, where there are people who want to be associated with STC we need to provide support. The online communities do this already, and managing physical ones in a way that is self-sustaining is worth exploring. One thing that I brought to the table in the Toronto community was experience from talking to leaders in other communities. Over the years I've met people from (top of my head on this list) communities in New York, Ohio, California, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Oregon, Illinois, Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, Hawaii, Pennsylvania, Michigan, North Carolina, as well as much of Canada and even from around Europe and India. These are people in the STC and I've asked them as many times as I can "what works for you, and what does not" and then brought these ideas to my local community. That's what we need. We don't need a strong presence in every country, but it would be great to be a strong resource for any region that wants to provide interested members a chance to meet, share, and grow.

Partnering is a great idea. The STC is already in many partnerships, some more formal than others. We have corporate partners we work with. There are partners in educational facilities that we work with. Many communities have set up partnerships as well. You learn a lot by partnering and there may be overlapping areas of expertise, but there are also unique sets of skills. I've presented at the tekcom conference several times and they are an excellent association, well run, profitable, and with solid leadership. We have a lot of that going for us. However, we can also learn from others, and should. At the very least, we should have a good partnership with tekcom, with ISTC in the United Kingdom, and with other organizations (even those in North America). Good partnerships lead to good opportunities.

Thanks for participating in the elections and for your questions. I hope that the detailed answers provide you some idea of my feelings on these items.

### **Ray Gallon Responds:**

STC has members in 50 countries. I doubt any other technical communications organization can say that. We are international, and people who work in one country, almost invariably have to work at the international level, with colleagues across the seas, and across time zones. Does this mean that we can be all things to all people in all countries? Surely not.

But we must be a truly international organization. This means more than changing our language to be well dressed for international audiences. It means being in contact with sister organizations world wide, acting in concert with them before international bodies such as the ISO and the ILO. STC should not view other technical communications associations as competitors or threats, but as partners that can help us gain access to open ears at administrative and government levels in other countries. We should partner with them on subjects such as the definition of the profession, the establishment of competencies required, educational programs in universities and technical colleges, etc.

The best way to do this is through the STC community on the ground, with solid back up and, where necessary, funding from the international organization.

If elected to the board, I will bring my experience as an international person, who has lived in four different countries, and as president of STC France, to discussions about how to improve our international stature and profile, and use that to help us find ways to strengthen our society in all its activities through its international role.

### **Li-At Ruttenberg Responds:**

I don't think it's practical, or even possible, for STC to directly have a strong presence in each country. But I think we can increase our relevance through online webinars that have presenters from various parts of the world; are held at times that accommodate non-U.S. time zones; and cost very little, if at all, to members.

I also think that STC should partner with other societies, as you suggest. Actually, I think it's critical to partner this way, and I think we need to do this soon—before we lose our opportunity to matter. Last year, over 2,000 people attended tekomp's conference in Germany. And tekomp's now also partnered with TWIN (Technical Writers of India) to hold conferences in India. These are societies with the same vision as ours, and they are making great strides in creating global significance. We must join them and others in partnerships soon, while we can be equals. We may otherwise risk falling by the wayside as others' dominance grows.

I think another way to globalize the society is by holding the official STC Summit in various parts of the world, on a rotating basis (either as a stand-alone conference or in partnership with another society). The Summit rotates within the U.S., but I think it would be worthwhile—and inclusive—to rotate it externally as well. That way, people who may not find it practical to attend the U.S. conference could attend it when it's closer to them. Plus, the presentation topics and vendors would likely take on more local flavors at each location (in addition to the international ones)—which means people in the various regions could find more value on topics closest to their interests. In past years, chapters such as the TransAlpine chapter and the UK and Ireland chapter hosted conferences. I commend them for these huge undertakings. I think that if the official STC Summit rotated globally, these sort of events could occur in India, Israel, the Middle East, Asia, Australia, South America, and even Africa. It could occur in places that don't have the local resources required to undertake such an endeavor, but which would welcome it and

which would finally truly globalize STC. I know this means the Summit would take a long time to return to each region if it followed our historical model; I think we can continue to discuss this and find a reasonable new model.

**Q. 4: Thank you for running for STC office. It's not light duty and takes a special person to do it well. While you have passion for the profession and lots of experience and accomplishments, what do you know about being on a board of directors? Are you familiar with the fiduciary responsibilities of a non-profit board? Do you know the responsibilities of individual board members? Do you know the legal responsibilities of a board? Do you know that speaking with one voice (a controversial topic among our members) is one of these responsibilities and is not something specific to the STC Board? Are you considering gaining solid knowledge in these areas an important step in preparing yourself to be an effective STC Board member? - Cindy Currie-Clifford**

### **Li-At Ruttenberg Responds:**

Each candidate has experience with non-profits, sometimes in different countries with different laws. Some of us have also run businesses. We have each been responsible for the well-being of an STC chapter and we all understand fundamental concepts and practices of financial responsibility. We know there are legal responsibilities, and if we don't yet know all the specifics, we are sure each of us is capable of learning, as we imagine was the case for sitting Board members.

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