

Project Proposal: Technical Devolution

Here is the original proposal made to the NAWG committee, regarding the devolution of technical responsibilities for the association.

It was written by Kevin Machin on 03-Feb-2018 and presented (by document, not in person) at the committee meeting held on 24-Feb-2018.

Please note that the project was later cancelled.

Proposal Summary

This document is a proposal to the committee of the National Association of Writers' Groups, concerning the technical aspects of the association, the main components of which are:

- The website.
- The email service.
- Other communication and collaboration facilities.

From now on, when I refer to the "website", I'll more often than not be including the other components listed above.

The proposal is for a way forward with the following goals in mind.

- To reduce or eliminate the dependency of the website on particular individual(s); currently me.
- To allow many people, without requiring technical skills, to provide and manage the website's content.
- To maintain or improve current levels of usefulness of the website.

Here are what I believe are some selling points for my proposal.

- Users will experience no disruption to the website and associated services (technical problems notwithstanding).
- Users will experience no loss of features nor functionality.
- Users will not experience any sudden changes to the look and feel of the website.

Regarding the responsibilities for the website, it's helpful to consider two main categories:

- The **content**: the site's pages, articles, comments, images, media, etc.
- The **technology**: the infrastructure, software and systems that run the site.

The Proposal

This section forms the proposal itself, but first, some thoughts about the time scales that would be involved. At the time of writing, it's difficult, if not impossible to put meaningful deadlines on anything. This is because the scope and details of what needs doing are only roughly defined. Instead, I've attempted to paint a sequence of events that depends on certain criteria being met, rather than on fixed dates. I've come up with the following two proposed phases.

- **Phase A**: which will last until the website's *content* (but necessarily not the underlying *technology*) no longer relies on me or other specifically skilled individual(s). Instead, any person can contribute, edit and maintain the website's content.
- **Phase B**: which will last until the website's underlying technology no longer depends solely on me.

These phases may overlap, in terms of what actually takes place during them. What's important is the criteria that define their end points. Here they are in more detail...

Phase A

Until others can manage website content.

I'll continue managing the website's underlying technology but, during this period, I'll be focusing on devolving my responsibilities for content management. To reiterate: the goal is to make the content changeable by others, rather than depending on me.

The details of this would need to be clarified, but it probably involves some or all of:

- Making content management software and procedures easier and less complex.
- Making updating data-driven content (e.g. the writing groups directory) not dependent on technical skills.
- Providing "how to" documentation and/or other training material.

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Phase B

Until others can manage underlying technology.

During this phase, some or all of my responsibilities for the website's technology will be devolved. This obviously depends on who would be taking over those duties, and what their capabilities are.

I'm happy to continue doing the technology related tasks, but remember the goal is to prevent things being entirely dependent on me. Finding others to help with this role would, in this case, require specific technical skill sets.

It may be possible to have a hybrid solution here, where I provide some of the services and others provide the remainder. As an example: the website administration could be handled by some and the software development (programming, etc.) aspects could be left to me, or a suitable replacement.

What Happens Next?

I'm aware that there are alternatives being considered, which include abandoning the current website and starting a new one from scratch. I obviously favour what I'm proposing here, but I'll respect the committee's decision.

Short Term

Until the committee decides what to do.

During this time, I'm happy to continue managing the website in its entirety: content, technology and services including the electronic mailbox and relays. This situation may need to continue for some time after the decision, depending on what's decided and what needs doing.

Longer Term

Should the committee decide against this proposal, then obviously things will be different. If the current website is to be abandoned, then my responsibilities would become those of helping with the transition to the new site. As a minimum, you would probably still need me to help with the administrative aspects, such as transferring domain names and data migration.

Here are the sequences of events, shown diagrammatically...

