



Discussion Paper: It's Time for a RASC Executive Director

November 2009

Executive Committee
RASC

Background

The last few years have been a busy and challenging time for the Society, National Council, and especially the Executive Committee. The Society itself, and the larger environment within which it works, have changed significantly, particularly with the changes to Canadian legislation governing charitable organizations. For our own part, our organization and operations have become increasingly complex. In addition our members and National Council demand a higher level of service, responsiveness, and professionalism than would have been the case ten years ago.

To wit, the RASC is a combination of three operational entities:

1. A federally registered charity
2. A publishing house
3. A membership organization

Each of these three elements requires the attention and effort of the Executive Committee. We have a staff of only 1.6 full-time employees. We have made great progress in dealing with complex and difficult issues over the last three years, but there is a long way to go yet before we can call our situation stable. Many things remain “on the back burner.” The Executive Committee is too busy coping with day-to-day issues on a best-able basis to give time and attention to some of the larger, more strategic tasks that now go begging. Under the existing staff model, these larger issues will remain ignored to the long-term detriment of the Society. Essentially, we are not able to pay any attention to the long-term growth, health, and stability of the Society. We remain in a constant state of swimming as fast as we can while just keeping our collective head above water. Ultimately this is dangerous. Our key volunteers are overwhelmed and burning out. We have difficulty recruiting or are unable to fill the critical volunteer positions. Too many things are being ignored. If the present trend continues, we risk the very existence of our beloved Society.

Rationale

The Executive Committee bears the responsibility for the health and wellbeing of the RASC. Its members are all consistently contributing about 20 hours per week on RASC business. The present situation is not just unsustainable — it is dangerous. It is neither feasible nor wise to assume we will continue to attract selfless super-volunteers who can give many hours per week over several years to run the RASC. Some current Executive members are presently jeopardizing their careers and personal lives because of this workload. We need staff that can assume more responsibility, make more decisions, and act on them without involving the Executive Committee in day-to-day decisions. To carry on with “business as usual” leaves the Society open to a couple levels of risk:

- Governance by benign neglect, where important issues are ignored and allowed to accumulate, leading to them potentially “boiling over” into a crisis
- An unexpected “straw that broke the camel’s back” event that will lead to an unplanned and rapid exit of a burned out volunteer Executive.

Nobody wants this to happen.

Proposal

The experiences of the past several years have brought the Executive Committee to the unanimous conclusion that the RASC must have a full-time, paid Executive Director to undertake and oversee the multiple management tasks of running our charitable, publishing, and membership functions.

Additionally, the RASC would require a second full-time staff member (under the supervision of the Executive Director) who would be the Office Manager and who would handle most of the tasks presently done by the Executive Secretary. Additionally, an undetermined amount of part-time help may also be required.

An Executive Director can provide the continuity, stability, and eventually some degree of institutional memory. These aspects of an organization are difficult to maintain with the built-in turnover that goes with volunteer Executive members. The Executive Committee and National Council will remain responsible for the Society’s strategic direction, and the Executive Committee will still be responsible for the hire, fire, and staff compensation decisions.

These are some of the important tasks that the Executive Committee does not have time for, but that must still be addressed on an on-going basis if the RASC is to survive and thrive in the future. The Executive Director, reporting to Council and working closely with the Executive Committee, will be charged with the following (in no particular order):

- Maintaining and improving relationships with, and services to, our members, Centres, and customers.
- Increasing our sales and membership base and expanding into a wider demographic.
- Development of charitable programs and concomitant fund-raising duties (grant writing and administration).
- Daily oversight of programs and operations.
- Management of charitable administrative chores.
- Development of human resources policies and practices.
- Assistance with development of long-range, strategic planning.
- Oversight and administration of our internally restricted funds.
- Management of our growing (restricted fund) investment portfolio.
- Strategic promotion of our publications and other products with a view to the long-term growth and health of the Society.
- Volunteer recruitment, retention, and recognition.

A proposed job description for an Executive Director is attached as Appendix I.

Funding a New Staff Position

The Executive and Finance Committees have analyzed our budget and determined that an Executive Director position can be funded through a combination of the following:

1. Proceeds from the sales of our Publications

2. Increased income from our long-term investments (see other proposal)
3. A modest membership fee increase of about \$6.

Note that we expect an Executive Director to take charge of grant writing that is to include some funding to support our other major staff position and/or charitable programs.

Proposed Long-Range Plan Framework

With an Executive Director in place we could look forward to developing and implementing a Long-Range Plan for the future growth of the RASC. For more information about what this means, please see the job description in **Appendix I**.

Here is a bare-bones version of outcomes we can reasonably expect:

In five years:

- Stable situation with staff, office, business, and financial affairs running smoothly
- Membership increased from 4000 to 5000
- Centres increased from 29 to 31
- Improved relationships between the national components of the Society and RASC Centres
- Establishment of program to broaden the Society demographic
- The establishment of a funded and viable national Education and Public Outreach (EPO) program
- Advance the opportunities for more Canadians to engage in astronomy and related science

In ten years:

- Stable situation with staff, office, business, and financial affairs running smoothly and thriving
- Membership increased from 5000 to 6000
- Centres increased from 31 to 33
- Solid positive relationships between the national components of the Society and RASC centres
- Growth of program to broaden the Society demographic
- Well established, vibrant, and growing national EPO program
- Expand the opportunities for more Canadians to engage in astronomy and related science

Appendix I: Draft Proposed Job Description - RASC Executive Director

Under the authority and guidance of the RASC Executive and Council, the Executive Director is responsible for the overall management of Society affairs, and to work toward achieving the goals and objectives of the Society as stated in the RASC Letters Patent.

Qualifications

Skills and Experience:

- Proven management and administrative skills, including financial and human resource management
- Knowledge and experience in the areas of non-profit, charitable, and/or public administration
- Superior verbal and written communications skills
- Strong planning and organizational ability
- Excellent interpersonal skills are essential to dealing effectively with a diverse group of interested, knowledgeable, and influential people, as well as maintaining staff and volunteer morale and direction.

Responsibilities

Executive, Council, and Membership:

- Assist the Executive and Council in the implementation of Society goals and objectives, and in the facilitation of long-range planning
- Serve as resource person to the Executive, Council, committees, and members
- Implement policies, programs, and other directives of the Executive and Council
- Ensure all pertinent information is circulated to the Executive, Council, committees, Centres, and/or membership in a timely manner
- Coordinate the arrangement of, and formally report to, all Council and Society meetings.

Administration:

- Work with the Executive and Council to establish operational policies and procedures in keeping with the overall objectives of the Society
- Provide general direction to, and review of, employees and volunteers under your direct supervision
- Ensure adequate record keeping in all areas of Society operations and ensure compliance with federal, provincial, and municipal regulations
- Maintain a working knowledge of significant developments and trends in the not-for-profit/charitable field
- Ensure that all transactions and correspondence are handled in an effective and timely manner
- Ensure proper maintenance of all property and equipment owned, rented, or leased by the Society
- Maintain confidentiality of all internal matters pertaining to the Society and its operations.

Program Management:

- Oversee and coordinate publishing, marketing, and sales activities undertaken by the Society
- Under the direction of the Executive and Council, develop ideas, programs, and

- opportunities to benefit the Society, its members, and its audiences
- Under the direction of the Executive and Council, assist in planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating special projects of benefit to the Society, its members, and its audiences.
 - Assist in developing and implementing a fundraising strategy
 - Assist the Executive and Council in attracting and retaining a qualified, active volunteer base

Finance:

- Work with Executive, Treasurer, and Finance committee to assess short- and long-term financial needs and recommend appropriate courses of action
- Work with Executive, Finance, and other committees to develop and monitor the annual operating budget, and report regularly to Executive and Council on the Society's financial situation
- Authorize routine expenditures within the total budget
- Identify and pursue all appropriate internal and external revenue sources
- Work with Executive and Council to implement policies and directives with regard to financial management
- Consult with Executive and Council on financial management, financial priorities, and budget matters, where appropriate.

Personnel:

- With Executive, oversee human resource management and conflict resolution
- With Executive, establish and maintain clear lines of communication and authority at all levels of the organization
- With Executive, establish and maintain effective employee-relations strategies including ongoing evaluation and monitoring of employee performance
- Assist with fundraising activities and other events undertaken by the Executive and Council, committees, Centres, and members.

Public Relations:

- Promote the objectives of the Society by establishing positive working relationships with employees, volunteers, members, Executive, Council and committees, the public, and external organizations with whom the Society works.
- Work with Executive, Council, and committees to develop and maintain professional liaison with the wider astronomy community in support of issues of mutual concern
- Develop and implement links with the media in order that the Society's mission and important activities are made known to the general community.