

ROSA 2020 AGM

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

Date: Thursday, 17 September, 2020

Time: 8pm to 10.30pm

Venue: Online via LiveWebinar

Meeting chaired by: Romy Sommer

Matters discussed

1. Roll call and confirmation of the quorum

Roll call was done by Mandy Verbaan, and a quorum of paid-up members with voting rights was confirmed. Six proxy votes were included.

2. Approval of 2019 AGM minutes

The minutes of the 2019 AGM were distributed to members in advance of this meeting. Mandy Verbaan approved the minutes, and this was seconded by Dorothy Ewels. No objections were received.

3. Thank yous

The Chair thanked the 2019-20 ExCo members for their service, as well as the chapter leaders, Marianne Lomborg and the Policy Committee, all newsletter and blog contributors, the Strelitzia mentors, Strelitzia and Imbali judges, and the Conference Committee.

4. Reading of the ROSA Vision Statement

The existing vision statement was read by the Chair. A revised vision statement, created following a recent survey of members, was then presented by the Chair.

The new vision statement was approved by Peter Barker, and seconded by Francine Beaton, Elsabe Welman, Dorothy Ewels and Didi Potgieter.

Margarethie Bredenkamp queried the use of the word “professional” in “an association of professional romance writers” in the first line of the vision statement. The Chair proposed changing the wording to “a professional association of romance writers”.

This proposal was approved by Suzanne Jefferies and seconded by Francine Beaton and Kim Hunter.

No further objections were received.

✓ **Decision: Amended Vision Statement approved.**

5. Annual reports: Chairperson, Treasurer and Chapters

Annual reports and the financial report were emailed to members in advance of this meeting. These were accepted as tabled.

- Suzanne Jefferies queried why the ROSA Publishing financials were not included in the annual financial statements for ROSA, if ROSA Publishing is wholly owned by ROSA. Peter Barker explained that ROSA Publishing’s financial year and reporting requirements differs from ROSA’s, so separate financial statements will be issued for ROSA Publishing.

Romy Sommer explained the purpose of ROSA Publishing for members who were not yet aware of the situation. ROSA Publishing is a registered company that was created in November 2019 in order to receive royalties from Amazon for the Wedding Season anthology published in 2019. There was initially some crossover between the accounts of ROSA and ROSA Publishing before the latter’s bank account was opened.

- Suzanne Jefferies queried whether ROSA has plans to spend the funds it has accumulated. The Chair responded that previous executive committees had been cautious with spending, but the ExCo is open to suggestions from members for how to spend these funds. This would be further addressed later in the meeting.
- Kim Hunter queried when ROSA Publishing’s financial statements would be available. The Chair confirmed that the draft statements were currently with the financial consultants, Bremner Advisory, and would be made available in due course on the ROSA website.

6. Amendments to ROSA Constitution

The original ROSA constitution was adapted from a generic constitution found online in 2014, when the non-profit organisation was registered. Now that ROSA has become more established, the constitution needs to be updated to match the organisation’s actual needs.

The outgoing ExCo, as well as a Policy Committee, led by Marianne Lomberg, have been updating the constitution, which is still in progress. Once all changes have been finalised and approved by the incoming ExCo, the draft will be distributed to all members for review, and following comments from members will then be voted on via Election Runner (the platform used for ExCo elections).

7. Review of Anthologies

The Chair apologized for the lack of progress and communication regarding the three anthologies that were due to be released in 2020.

At the start of the pandemic, it was recommended to the ExCo that the anthologies be delayed until the global situation settled, as anthologies were no longer selling well. Since then, Dani Rene has designed covers for the three anthologies, but all other progress stalled. The new incoming ExCo will re-look publication dates and take this forward.

- Suzanne Jefferies requested that a formal communication be sent out to all anthology participants with an update on the situation.
- Margarethie Bredenkamp questioned what happened with the anthologies and why they were not published in 2020 as planned. The Chair explained that the person who had volunteered to run the anthologies dropped out without notice, and no-one else on the ExCo was available or had the expertise to take this over. Mandy Verbaan added that a lesson learned from this experience is that instead of having ROSA initiatives run by a single volunteer, they should be run by committees made up of at least three people, so that if one person drops the ball there are others who can step in.
- Margarethie Bredenkamp suggested that ROSA should advertise the position of the anthology manager, and should allocate funds for this position.

✓ **Decision: Communication will be sent out to all anthology participants.**

8. Scholarship Program feedback

2020 is the first year we have run this scholarship program, which was funded by the royalties from the 2019 Wedding Season anthology. Thank you to the members who contributed stories to this anthology and who donated their royalties to ROSA.

Four recipients were allocated funds to spend on ROSA's educational events, such as webinars and conference attendance, as well as to cover annual membership fees etc. All four made good use of the funds. This has been an excellent initiative, and it is recommended that the program be continued.

The Chair proposed running the Scholarship Program again in 2021. This was approved by Dorothy Ewels, and seconded by Mandy Verbaan and Kim Hunter.

- Margarethie Bredenkamp commented that ROSA cannot continue to fund scholarships as it only supports unpublished members, and excludes published members. The Chair noted that all members, both published and unpublished, can apply for scholarships, as the funds could be used for all ROSA events. The Chair confirmed that the wording would be clarified in 2021 to ensure it is clear that the scholarships are available to both published and unpublished members.
- Margarethie Bredenkamp queried who decided on the allocation of scholarships. The Chair responded that once all the applications and motivation letters were received, the ExCo discussed the applications, and the allocation was a joint committee decision.
- Margarethie Bredenkamp's microphone was unmuted to enable her to make the following comment: if ROSA is a professional association, then ROSA must do more for published authors. More resources should be made available for things that benefit published authors. The Chair responded that any member who has suggestions for how ROSA can support its published members, should send their suggestions to the ExCo. It is easy to use our published members' expertise to build up new authors, but much more difficult to know how to support already published authors, so we are open to all suggestions.
- Mandy Verbaan queried whether there is an ExCo email address. The Chair responded that there is not yet a dedicated email address, but that it is a good idea and one will be set up so that all members can send suggestions to that address.
- Vash Karuppa proposed that ROSA run a robust mentorship programme where experienced authors mentors developing authors. She stated that many other industries run programmes like this which can be duplicated, and she would send her ideas to the ExCo. Francine Beaton agreed with Vash's proposal, stating that experienced authors need to help others.
- ✓ **Decision: Scholarships will again be offered in 2021.**
- ✓ **Decision: Scholarship communications will be re-written for better clarity.**
- ✓ **Decision: A ROSA ExCo email address will be set up.**

9. 2020 Imbali Contest feedback

Mandy Verbaan reported back on the 2020 Imbali Contest for published authors. Deadlines were pushed back due to the pandemic and lockdown, to enable entrants a chance to enter amidst the turmoil.

12 English entries were received, but one was disqualified due to the length of the entry. Only 4 Afrikaans entries were received, which is not enough to cover the costs (cost of trophy, postage of books to judges etc).

The scoring rubric was extended this year, also enabling judges to make comments on the entries which could then be forwarded to entrants. Scoring has gone digital this year, and some new judges were added.

- Margarethie Bredenkamp queried why the contest is only open to entrants in English and Afrikaans, and not in South Africa's other official languages. The Chair explained that there are not enough members, judges or reviewers who write or read in vernacular to make it logistically feasible to run the contest in other languages.
- Margarethie Bredenkamp then proposed making the contest English only. Mandy Verbaan explained that a quarter of ROSA's membership is Afrikaans and should not be excluded. The Afrikaans members requested an Afrikaans Imbali, and this was voted on and agreed in past AGMs.
- The decision was taken to continue to offer an Afrikaans Imbali Award, but that a minimum number of entries must be met in order to cover costs. Mandy Verbaan encouraged all Afrikaans published authors to enter the contest.

✓ **Decision: Minimum entry numbers will be set for future Imbali contests.**

10. 2020 Strelitzia Contest feedback

Romy Sommer presented feedback on the 2020 Strelitzia mentorship and contest, and also gave a background on the contest for newer members.

The one change from the previous year was that a limit was placed on how much editing work the mentors would do for mentees in 2020, as it was felt that in previous years mentees had taken advantage of their mentors and used them as free editors. This resulted in fewer mentors returning in 2020. It also resulted in an uneven playing field between the entrants as some received more editorial support than others.

In 2020, entrants paid a higher entry fee, in return for which they had an exclusive Facebook group, weekly lessons, free access to five webinars (thanks to Romy Sommer, Suzanne Jefferies and Sharonlee Holder for presenting these!) and weekly Q&As with judges and published authors. This webinar program then grew into the wider ROSA webinar program during lockdown.

The biggest challenge in 2020 was finding sufficient mentors. As a result, several mentors took on two mentees in order to enable all the applicants to take part. The ExCo agreed to give mentors a year's free membership of ROSA as thanks for their time and effort.

Several mentors commented that mentoring was a very rewarding process.

Suzanne Jefferies also gave feedback following several years of involvement in the Strelitzias as both a mentor and organiser. She proposed separating the mentorships from the contest, due to private feedback from mentees who felt that not all mentors were equal in experience or availability, which created an unequal playing field. It was proposed that in future mentors be used as cheerleaders and to assist with goal setting, rather than as a free editorial service. This would have the added bonus of levelling the playing field.

Suzanne also stated that there is a perception among members that mentors are showing off by offering to mentor. She pointed out that mentorship is voluntary and time-consuming, and members do not join a professional association in order to donate their time and expertise for free. There has been an attitude among mentees in recent years that their mentors do not do enough for them. Mentees should be grateful for the help they receive rather than feeling entitled to more assistance. This is the same attitude reflected in the earlier comments in this meeting that the more experienced authors should be expected to help others, and it should be noted that published members do not “need” to donate their time to edit, mentor, teach webinars or volunteer. Unpublished writers make up only 37% of this organisation. We cannot expect the remaining 63% to pay a membership fee to ROSA and then be obliged to work for free to develop the 37%. Suzanne asked what ROSA is doing for its published members to make membership worthwhile.

Suzanne’s proposal to separate mentorships from the Strelitzia program was seconded by Kim Hunter and Margarethie Bredenkamp, who both supported the idea that Strelitzia entrants instead receive development through webinars, lessons and Q&As rather than one-on-one mentorship. Kim Hunter proposed that anonymous bios for the mentors should be made available to mentees and mentorships should be entirely voluntary.

Suzanne Jefferies then also proposed getting rid of the second round of the contest, and changing the contest from two rounds to just one round, as those who did not make the second round felt too disappointed to keep going. By having only one round, there would be more time for entrants to complete a full manuscript, which would be of more benefit to all entrants. It was pointed out that this might create difficulty in finding judges, as judging will be much more time-consuming. It was therefore proposed that entries be limited to a 50k maximum word limit, and a “Do Not Finish” feature should be added, enabling judges to stop reading at 25% if the entry is not a likely candidate for the award. This was seconded by Dani Rene, Kim Hunter and Dorothy Ewels.

- ✓ **Decision: The 2021 Strelitzia Contest will not include one-on-one mentorships or editing, and all entrants will receive equal access to lessons and webinars.**
- ✓ **Decision: The 2021 contest would have only one round, and all entrants will enter a completed manuscript for judging.**
- ✓ **Decision: Judges would be able to mark an entry as DNF if they have read more than 25% and believe the entry is not an award contender.**

11. Report back on ROSACon 2020

Romy Sommer gave the following report back:

ROSACon2020 takes place in 32 days, and will be ROSA's first virtual conference due to Covid. The advantages of going virtual are: (1) that we save on venue and catering fees, (2) the conference is accessible to our wider membership and not restricted to those able to travel to the venue, and (3) has enabled access to international guest speakers.

R56k is needed this year to cover costs. The costs are mainly guest speaker fees.

The SA authors, Julia Quinn, Nalini Singh and Marie Force agreed not to charge fees on the condition that ROSA offer scholarships to the conference.

As at today's date, bookings total at R46.4k (the equivalent of 31 full bookings) so a further 6 full bookings are required in the next month for the event to break even.

Other advantages of the 2020 conference is that delegates can sign up just for the themed days they're interested in, and can therefore tailor their booking to their own budgets.

15 out of the 18 guest speakers have agreed that their sessions can be recorded, however due to Intellectual Property / Copyright considerations these recordings will only be available for a limited time after the event to those who signed up for the conference.

Recordings cannot be sold after the conference, so everyone who wants access to the content must register for the conference.

- Mandy Verbaan proposed that all future conferences be digital, and that chapters host smaller in-person retreats. This was seconded by Suzanne Jefferies, Romy Sommer, Kim Hunter and Francine Beaton.
- Suzanne Jefferies raised a concern regarding the expense of the conference, that the cost is not much lower than past years, and this was noted. It is suggested that in order to reduce future costs, the conference should be fewer days and have fewer international guest speakers.
- Suzanne Jefferies also recommended that new topics be added to the program, not topics that have been covered at past conferences, and there should be more topics aimed at more experienced authors.

- Caitlin Brown suggested that future conferences could be a combination of face-to-face and online.
- Mandy Verbaan proposed that in future local guest speakers should be paid, as well as international guest speakers. This was seconded by Suzanne Jefferies, Dorothy Ewels and Vash Karuppa.
- Francine Beaton recommended that ROSA's more experienced authors create a 'bosberaad / think tank' to suggest ideas for what they want to see at future conferences. This was seconded by Vash Karuppa, Dorothy Ewels and Dani Rene.
- Dani Rene queried why there were so few South African guest speakers this year. Romy Sommer replied that this was in order to have "fresh blood" rather than the same speakers who have been involved in past years (many of ROSA's most experienced authors have presented at every conference to date), and to take advantage of the access this year to international authors, and she agreed that perhaps we went overboard with the international guest speakers, and future conferences should have a better balance between local and international. Dorothy Ewels added that since the same small pool of members tend to volunteer for everything (guest speaking, mentoring, judging) the pool of local volunteers is very limited. Suzanne Jefferies agreed with this.
- ✓ **Decision: Future conferences will be virtual, with individual chapters running their own local in-person retreats (when Covid permits).**
- ✓ **Decision: Conference organisers will strive for a better balance between local and international guest speakers. All speakers will be paid.**
- ✓ **Decision: ROSA's more experienced authors will create a 'think tank' to suggest content for future conferences.**

12. Membership fees and renewals

At the 2019 AGM annual membership fees were increased from R250 to R300 per annum for the 2020-21 membership year and split payments were allowed for those who requested it. A generous benefactor also sponsored ten memberships for those in financial need – four members have applied for these sponsored memberships to date.

Dorothy Ewels proposed keeping the 2021-22 fees as is, due to the financial constraints of the pandemic, and this was seconded by Peter Barker, Dani Rene and Vash Karuppa.

- ✓ **Decision: Membership fees for the 2021-22 year to remain as per the 2020-21 year (R300 a year if paid at once, or R340 a year if paid in two instalments. International membership \$15 per year).**

13. ExCo Election Results

The election of the new ExCo took place online via Election Runner, for the second year running. There were 12 volunteers for 8 places. The following 8 candidates were voted onto the new 2020-21 Executive Committee:

Mandy Verbaan, Romy Sommer, Peter Barker, Dani Rene, Francine Beaton, Dorothy Ewels, Vash Karuppa and Joss Wood.

The officer roles on the ExCo (Chairperson, Deputy Chair and Treasurer) will be determined during the new committee's first meeting. Additional optional roles are Secretary and Communications (the latter a new role proposed by Romy Sommer)

14. Review of chapters

The chapter reports were included in the Annual Report distributed in advance of this meeting. A discussion was had regarding leadership of the chapters, as follows:

- Johannesburg: Mandy Verbaan has resigned as chapter leader. We are still looking for a volunteer to take over.
- Pretoria: Marie Dry has resigned, and Francine Beaton has volunteered to take over.
- Garden Route: Tanya Hoeksema has agreed to continue as chapter leader.
- Durban: Yolande Pienaar offered to manage a KZN chapter.
- Bloemfontein: currently has 2-3 members. Is this big enough for a chapter?

15. Volunteers Needed

- Memberships: Kristien Wolmarans has stepped down. Romy Sommer will take over membership admin.
- Scholarships: Dorothy Ewels has agreed to continue running this program.
- Ethic Committee Chair: no volunteers as yet.
- Policy Committee Chair: Vash Karuppa offered to help with this.
- Marketing: Francine Beaton volunteered to be on the committee for this.
- Communications: Dani Rene volunteered to lead this, with assistance from Vash Karuppa
- Quarterly newsletter: Dani Rene volunteered .
- Website updates: Francine Beaton volunteered, as she is familiar with the Wix platform.
- Blog manager: Dani Rene offered to manage the block – the role is to manage those volunteers who have offered to create content.

- Social media: Francine Beaton offered to lead this. Francine recommended using Panoply to schedule social media, advised ROSA creating an Instagram presence, and also recommended starting something similar to RNA's Twitter Tuesdays.
- Strelitzia Contest: Suzanne Jefferies has resigned from this committee. Romy Sommer will continue and Dorothy Ewels volunteered to take Suzanne's place.
- Mandy Verbaan queried whether limits should be put on committee service and recommended that contest admins should be rotated in order to have "fresh blood". A maximum of 2-3 years on one committee was agreed, so another volunteer is required to take Romy's place on the Strelitzia committee.
- Imbali Contest: Mandy Verbaan will continue administering this contest for one more year, and needs a new volunteer to assist who can take over next year, as Mandy has already served on this committee for two years.
- Conferences: a new conference chair is required to lead the 2021 conference committee. No volunteers as yet for Chair, but Vash Karuppa offered to assist with this.
- Retreats: these will be managed by the chapter leaders.
- Anthologies: Dani Rene offered to take over the anthologies.
- Webinars: Romy Sommer was removed from running the webinar program in May, so a new volunteer is needed. Dorothy Ewels volunteered to take this over.

16. New Initiatives

- Podcasts: an initial experiment at a podcast received negative feedback, however the outgoing ExCo felt that podcasts would be a good idea, but must be done professionally, and voted that ROSA should spend money to do this properly. Quotes have been sourced from three local podcast companies, and Pravina Maharaj has recorded opening and closing "stings". It was proposed that the podcasts be in the form of interviews rather than educational. Volunteer are needed to administer and present the podcasts.
- Libraries outreach: the purpose is to increase awareness locally about ROSA, to find new members (especially vernacular writers, as recommended earlier in the meeting), to build a readership for local romance authors, and to reach out to disadvantaged communities. Dorothy Ewels and Dani Rene volunteered to lead an outreach committee.
Margarethie Bredenkamp expressed the opinion that ROSA should be an English-only organisation.

- Liaison with other writer organisations: this was recommended by a respondent in the recent vision statement survey. Michael Cordes and Francine Beaton volunteered to assist with this.
- Critique partner service: another request through the vision statement survey. A volunteer will be needed to administer a database and connect people. Yolande Pienaar volunteered to assist.
- Merchandising: another request through the vision statement survey. A volunteer would be needed to manage products, payments, shipping etc. Dani Rene recommended using TeeRepublic. Tracy Fox suggested this should fall under Marketing & PR, so that branding remains consistent, and Mandy Verbaan agreed.
- Advocacy: this was also requested through the recent surveys. While ROSA has some resources, we do not yet have the resources (financial or expertise) to assist with legal advice or take on big sites like Amazon, but we could perhaps have a member to handle requests and liaise with the ExCo.
- It should be noted that not all these initiatives are likely to be accomplished in the coming year. ROSA relies on new volunteers to drive these new initiatives, as the existing volunteers are already busy managing all the existing programs ROSA runs. If members would like to get involved in any of the above initiatives, please contact admin@romancewriters.co.za.

17. Any Other Business

- Margarethie Bredenkamp requested that the name of the Afrikaans WhatsApp group be changed to be grammatically correct. This was agreed.

The Chair thanked everyone who attended the AGM, especially as it was a very long meeting. A recording of the meeting will be made available to all members as soon as possible.

Romy Sommer

Chairperson 2014-2020