

SMOFCon Chair's Response to the joint statement

As chair, and producer (department head) for the Fannish Inquisition/Question Time, it is my responsibility to address and respond to the concerns raised by several groups regarding the updated questions for groups presenting in the Fannish Inquisition/Question Time.

1. *The number of questions included in the questionnaire increased from twenty-one (21) in prior years to seventy-one (71) questions in the current version, significantly increased the workload to respond.*

At last year's SMOFCon Andrew Trembly expressed to me his believe that the existing FAQ questions were out of date because most groups were regularly answering many or most of these questions either as part of their presentation, on their website, or elsewhere, and new questions were starting to be asked regularly. Noting that, I asked him to coordinate the FAQs, and to update the questionnaire.

As a leader, I generally assume competence in the people I hire for jobs and unless I see issues with how they are doing the job, I don't step in. In this case, I may have missed that the number of questions was increasing. More importantly, I failed to notice that the work on the revised questionnaire had stopped.

The number of questions does increase the workload in researching and answering the questions by more than two-fold.

The notice of the new questionnaire was published by SMOFCon 37 on November 18, 2019, thirteen (13) days before the deadline to respond of December 1, 2019. The initial notice was sent to the list of the members of SMOFCon, and to the general SMOFs list. It was announced at that time that efforts to contact seated Worldcons and bids would take place afterwards, i.e., those who did not see the original announcement would have even less than 13 days to respond.

The delay was largely due to the fact that I was focused on other aspects of the convention and the Fannish Inquisition/Question Time throughout September and October, and of equal importance at least to me, also dealing with a very busy time at work and some issues with my family, both of which meant that I did not have the time or energy to track every detail of the convention.

As I said above, I assume competence and avoid micromanaging. I missed the fact that the questionnaire had not gone out until it was brought to my attention.

At that time, I worked to get it out as quickly as possible, giving Andrew one more chance to put it out.

When I sent it out, I made the initial announcement as broadly as possible to cover as many of the possible people of interest as I could – covering the SMOFS, and SMOFCon email lists, and the JOF Facebook group. I then, in my opinion, as a courtesy also worked to send private emails to the members of the convention that I could identify as potential Fannish Inquisition/Question Time participants.

This second communique was delayed a couple of days largely because when this was happening I was in the middle of a business trip where I was putting in occasional 12 hour days, and by company policy sharing a car with my coworkers so wholly dependent on their schedules for when I could be at the hotel to work on non-work projects. During this trip I was not in a location that allowed me to work on this unless I was at the hotel either.

Finally, on this, I personally find the notifications to the email lists and the Facebook group equally or more important than any personal messages to convention members, having not been contacted and asked for a bid FAQ for one or more recent SMOFCon when I was bidding for SMOFCon. Therefore, I felt that getting this information out broadly was important, and reaching targeted individuals was secondary.

- 2. The timing of this announcement was also problematic as over half of the standing chairs and bid chairs were attending an event in Chengdu (hosted by the Chengdu Bid Team) or taking part in extensive international travel during most of this time. Immediately following this was a national holiday in the USA.*

The timing of this and the delays have been covered extensively above.

- 3. In the spirit of fairness, we object to the fact that the format of the questionnaire was released in a manner that is completely inaccessible to one of the declared bids. Google Docs are not able to be accessed in China.*

This was unintentional, and largely due to ignorance. Once I got the base documents from Andrew as Google Documents, my goal was to release them and the announcement as soon as I could because I was aware that we were late. As I have mentioned before, I was also in the middle of a business trip so my time to work on converting the documents to other formats was limited, and my goal was to get this information out to as many people as quickly as I could so that they could start working. Once I became aware of this issue I worked on getting alternate formats available, though I acknowledge that this was very late.

- 4. The attached submission represents the best effort that each Worldcon or Worldcon bid was able to coordinate in such a short time and with the understanding that all of us are volunteers.*

SMOFCon 37 is also all volunteers, and we probably have a smaller staff doing more varied jobs than many Worldcons and Worldcon bids.

And, at least to me, most of this document comes across as a critique of how we managed this process, not as an explanation for why the older FAQ was used by several of the participants, while others used the published questionnaire.