



## Presidents Column

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## ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

The abbreviation “OW process” has become a common phrase in IBA Council lingo. It refers to the so-called Oliver Wyman process, i.e. the review of IBA by the management consultant company Oliver Wyman (OW) that has resulted in a blueprint on how to restructure our current professional organization of bear biologists to a larger, professionally-staffed and broader-reaching organization with a greatly increased budget to increase IBA’s impact with our primary goal, the science-based conservation of bear populations in the world. Council has voted favorably on a vote for IBA to develop and adapt the OW plan and to transform IBA into a professional organization. Based on this vote, Council has taken several steps to move forward with this transition. These steps can be divided into the four main tasks of: organizational building, fund raising, developing a core conservation strategy, as well as communication with members and member approval of organizational change. Below I outline the main content of each task and how Council is working with it.

### Organizational building

Council has prepared a timeline for the implementation of several work streams from 2018 until 2020. This timeline functions as an outline of the transition process as well as the work steps necessary. As an all-volunteer organization, the current Council, Executive Officers in particular, are maxed out with the current workload so, hiring staff will be key for the implementation of this transition. We have met with the directors of Polar Bears International as well as with the Chief Operating Officer of National Audubon Society for general advice on how to approach such a transition process. These discussions, along with feedback from OW, formed the basis for staff position descriptions, such as an Executive Director (ED) and a Director of Transition/Capacity Building (DT/CB). The ED should report to a Board of Directors and the DT/CB should report to IBA Council.

In short, the ED should have the strategic and operational responsibility for IBA’s conservation programs. Whereas overall course direction and operating philosophy will continue to be set by IBA Council, the main tasks of an ED will be to lead the fundraising efforts, develop and implement the IBA’s strategic vision, and to implement a new model for soliciting, prioritizing, and funding proposals for research and conservation projects. Council has put together a Committee to lead the search for the ED. The team consists of IBA members, Council, and external professionals.



The first main task for a DT/CB will be to lead the search team for the ED. Once the ED is hired, the DT/CB will work closely with the ED in understanding IBA's structure and operations workflow, to maintain the services and opportunities for IBA members, work together on fund raising efforts, and to develop capacity building programs designed to build regional scientific and conservation expertise. OW was adamant that the DT/CB needs to be a person with intimate knowledge of IBA, and Council fully agrees with this assessment. Draft position descriptions for both positions are currently under review by Council.

### Fundraising

No transition or hiring of staff is possible without a solid financial basis. Council is currently working on a sustainable financial plan, and has managed to obtain a significant amount as seed funding for a transition process. However, more funds are needed, and one of the main tasks of Council and any potentially hired staff must be to obtain additional funding. As members of IBA, if you have any suggestions or thoughts for sources of additional fundraising opportunities, we always welcome comments and encourage you to contact a Council member with your thoughts.

### Conservation strategy

OW strongly pushed the need for a “pitch” that outlines IBA’s conservation strategy and goals. A pitch is essential when approaching potential donors or for applying for grants and other funding opportunities. A draft conservation strategy is currently under review by Council.

### Communication with Members and Member approval of organizational change

Crucial for the proposed transition of IBA into a larger, professionally-staffed and broader-reaching organization is the support of our membership. The results of the 2015 membership survey clearly showed that members want IBA to command a higher profile on the world conservation stage and play a bigger, more impactful role in conservation of bears, in part by providing far more funding for on-the-ground bear science and conservation work. As a note of interest, our membership has grown substantially since 2011 when from 2011-2014 numbers were consistently between 300-350 and since 2014 membership numbers have been between 500-550.

However, a question presents itself: How does Council strike the balance between taking bold steps forward in making leadership decisions and keeping the membership informed and involved, while building and maintaining their full support? As elected Council, our authority to make decisions is vested in us through the Bylaws, and it is our understanding of the Bylaws that IBA Council can hire people for the above described positions. However, Council will seek legal support to ensure that the bylaws fully approve organizational and structural changes.



But, how should Council approach membership for their support and approval? Based on many internal Council discussions, as well as advice from OW and other organizations, I believe it is best to draft the working business and governance plans we need to articulate and accomplish these goals, and to propose an appropriate set of revised Bylaws to the membership. This is the process IBA has used in the past for structural changes, and it is what the Bylaws specify. However, prior to such a potential vote, Council will provide detailed information on the process via electronic outlets, such as eblasts and the IBA website.

I strongly believe that the membership will be in support to transition IBA to a larger, professionally-staffed and broader-reaching organization with a greatly increased budget, as long as we stay true to our objectives, stay financially responsible, and do not neglect or stray from the programs and attributes that our members currently value so much. We hope that with this transition, IBA will be able to provide more support to conserve and manage all 8 bear species in the world, not just to areas of high risk. I encourage you to visit the IBA membership meeting at the upcoming IBA conference in Slovenia, where we will provide more information about IBA's future.

#### **LIFE WITH BEARS – THE NEXT IBA CONFERENCE IS AROUND THE CORNER!**

Slovenia is hosting the coming IBA conference in the beautiful city of Ljubljana from September 16-21, 2018. It promises to be a great conference with seven exciting sessions: Human-bear interactions and management; Bears and society; Bear ecology, behaviour and physiology; Bears and climate change; BSG session; Spatial requirements and demographic characteristics of bear populations; and Molecular genetics in bear conservation and management. In addition, four workshops are planned, including topics ranging from bear personalities, genetic monitoring, bear monitoring in Southeast Asia, as well as on bridging the gap between in situ and ex situ research. If you wish to attend one of the workshops, make sure to visit the conference website and select the workshop you would like to attend. Several excursions to UNESCO world heritage sites are planned, and I can promise spectacular scenery!

Slovenia shares a rich cultural heritage with southeastern as well as central Europe, and is a microcosm of Europe in itself. In "Europe's green heart" you can travel within 3 hours from the incredible scenery of rugged mountains in the North through luscious beech forest to the dry karst region and have a delicious fish dinner at the Adriatic sea in the South. Slovenia and Slovenians are famous for their hospitality and for their delicious and hearty foods; be sure to taste some [kranjska klobása](#) or krvavi cremeschnitte along the road. Also, Slovenia has spirit...so be sure to follow up both dishes with some slivovica! Please find more information at <https://lifewithbears.eu/>. Vidim se v Sloveniji!