

# Questions About the Open Stories Foundation

by James Patterson | May 23, 2017 | Featured, Mormonism | 35 comments



One of John Dehlin's signature lines on Mormon Stories is that "sunshine is the greatest antiseptic."

Perhaps that's why there's so much interest surrounding issues relating to the Open Stories Foundation, such as compensation, transparency, allegations of sexism and nepotism and so on. There's a certain amount of appropriate irony in shining a spotlight on the guy who has made his career out of shining a spotlight.

I have considered John a friend since 2014 when I first contacted him about my faith crisis. That friendship evolved into a working relationship later that year when I became an independent contractor for the Open Stories Foundation, serving as a podcast producer and helping out in general with the podcast and fundraising. I should note that I had an exceptional experience working with, and for, John. No complaints in that regard.

That working relationship mutually ended in early 2015 but, for the most part and despite never having met in person, John and I have remained friends. But sometimes being a friend means asking tough questions.

In light of all that has been discussed over the last several days, as someone who has both worked for and donated to the Open Stories Foundation, I still have several unanswered questions.

I'm personally not here to adjudicate personal issues and differences between John Dehlin and former Open Stories Foundation podcasters. I'm not here to referee who blocked whom on Facebook. But recent events have created a spotlight on the operations of OSF as a non-profit organization.

Much has been made by John about the Church acting as a for-profit and hiding behind a non-profit status. After looking into publicly available information regarding the operation of the Open Stories Foundation, I have to be honest. I have some of the same concerns about the organization he now leads.

Luckily, John announced today on his Facebook page that he would answer questions surrounding these very issues in an upcoming podcast. I hope he addresses the following issues:

**1. Who comprises the Board of the Open Stories Foundation**, and why is this information not listed on the Foundation's website on a regular basis? Even the "statement" from the OSF Board from a few days ago didn't actually name the Directors. Who *actually* wrote that document? Was it actually signed off on by the full Board? If so, why weren't their names listed? And why aren't any of them answering these questions?

Let's back up for a moment...who is actually on the Board?

In its most current listing with the Arizona Corporate Commission, Amy Grubbs is listed as the Chairman of the Foundation. She is *also* listed on the website as the Foundation's Director of Operations.

Currently registered Board members include:

Amy Grubbs (Chairman)

John Dehlin (President)

Craig Woodfield (Director)

Roger McOmbler (Director)

Lee Stowell (Director)

Why is none of this information readily available? And why is information on who these Board Members are not available on the OSF website? Who are these people and what is their relationship to John and/or OSF?

Besides the lack of transparency, there's also a bit of sloppiness going on with the 501(c)3 filings. For example, the mailing address for Lee Stowell is incorrect. There is no Millburn, Delaware as far as I have been able to find. There is, however, a Millburn, New Jersey. Is this merely sloppy bookkeeping? There's also a discrepancy of who actually is on the Board of Directors, with John stating recently that Amy is not on the Board.

Lots of questions here, but the bottom line here is the sloppiness by which the Board is organized. If this is sloppy, where else has the Foundation been sloppy?

**2. Understanding how the OSF Board of Directors is comprised brings up another issue: conflict of interest.**

For those not familiar with 501(c)3 regulations, non-profits are in general governed by a Board of Directors. This is a governing body that makes all major decisions relating to the corporation.

While it is not unusual to have paid staff members on the Board of Directors, it is highly unusual (and even perhaps unethical) to have them involved in the decision making when it comes to compensation. Many Boards have in place a compensation committee, comprised of all non-employees, to mitigate any conflict of interest concerns.

*(An earlier version of this post stated here that OSF Director Craig Woodfield is also the Foundation's certified public accountant. This is incorrect. Craig is a CPA, but not for the Foundation)*

All of these issues raise more questions than answers. Namely:

Does the Open Stories Foundation Board have compensation and hiring committees that can fairly make decisions about how much to pay John Dehlin and Amy Grubbs, whether or not to hire his wife as a podcaster, how the books are done and other decisions that may create obvious conflicts of interest?

**3. Then there is the issue of compensation itself.** As I mentioned before, it is not unusual for non-profits to handsomely pay their CEOs and other

What is unusual, at least in my experience, is the ratio at which and the manner in which John is being compensated.

First, the ratio. The CEO of Planned Parenthood, for example, received approximately \$754,000 in total compensation according to its last financial report. That's roughly 0.0005% of the organization's annual total revenue of \$1.26 billion.

John Dehlin is paid roughly \$85,000 plus "annual incentives" that are not outlined by the OSF Board of Directors. That amounts to 49.7% of the Open Stories Foundation's total annual income in 2015.

In a compensation study conducted by non-profit magazine Blue Avocado, the median CEO salary for charities pulling in between \$100,000 to \$500,000 in revenue is about \$42,600. Open Stories Foundation is on the very low end of that revenue scale.

Not only that, but nowhere in the OSF's finance documents does it list John's salary. Instead, there is a line for "Contract Services" in 2015 for a total amount of over \$91,000.

So is John an independent contractor or a salaried employee? If the former, that seems highly unusual to me.

Is it ethical for a non-profit to be paying its CEO almost half of its total annual revenue? Non-profits are meant to be organizations that use donations to create public good, not primarily as sources of income for their Directors. That's why non-profit designation was created.

The ratio of organization revenue to John's compensation seems raises serious questions.

**4. There's also the issue of compensation as it relates to nepotism.** As listeners are well aware, Margi Dehlin joined Mormon Stories late last year in a new project called "Mormon Transitions." Is Margi paid in addition to John's compensation? And how was that hiring decision made? By an independent Board committee? Or was John the decision-maker?

It's clear that John has built something special in Mormon Stories and the rest of the Open Stories Foundation. Numbers don't lie. John has a huge following, and he has done well to convert that following into an ability to support himself and his family. Many people in this situation would, rightfully so, use this as an opportunity to start a private, for-profit business.

But the decision to go the non-profit route, as John has with the Open Stories Foundation, comes with it **lots** of accountability. John has made it his career to hold the Church accountable, no matter the consequences.

As the face, Executive Director and member of the Board of Directors, John is accountable to everyone who has ever donated even a penny to his organization to make sure everything is done ethically and responsibly.

If there is nothing untoward going on with the Open Stories Foundation and its operation as a legitimate 501(c)3 non-profit organization, John will be able to answer the above with clarity, along with other questions that have been raised.

I look forward to him, and the rest of the Board of Directors, doing so.

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## James Patterson

James Patterson lives with his wife and two children in North Carolina. He makes no apologies for being an avid fan of both Duke basketball and Taylor Swift.

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## 35 Comments



**Nigel** on May 23, 2017 at 4:28 pm

I think you have that planned parenthood salary figure wrong. \$754 million?

Reply



**James Patterson** on May 23, 2017 at 6:03 pm

Yes, I've fixed. Thanks!

Reply

**Nigel** on May 23, 2017 at 10:11 pm