

2023 Outgoing President Letter: Molly O'Connor

Hello everyone, and happy winter season from the Minnesota Evaluation Association's (MNEA) Outgoing President, Molly O'Connor!

This is when many folks celebrate holidays and spend time with family and friends. Please take time this busy season to rest, rejuvenate, and reflect on what you are grateful for.

First, a Social Justice Grounding. <3

I wanted to name that 2023 was heavy, and my heart hurts from the injustices that have defined the year:

- The 30,000+ (and rising) number of Palestinian people killed in Gaza by the far-right Zionist Israeli government (funded by the U.S. and other countries), the thousands of Palestinians unjustly imprisoned in Israeli jails, and the continued apartheid that touches the West Bank and all Palestinian people.
- The estimated 1200 Israelis and Foreign Nationals (who were killed in a Hamas-led attack on Oct 7th, 2023), the individuals who are still held hostage in Gaza, and the emotional toll this has had on Jewish folks and the families of the foreign nationals caught in the crossfire.
- The decades-long humanitarian crisis happening in Congo. And how the U.S. (and other rich countries) benefit from Congo's rich natural resources to the detriment of the Congolese people.
 - And honestly, so many other African countries are in similar situations, many of which are a result of the historical impacts of settler colonialism.
- The estimated 100,000+ Ukrainians killed and displaced by the Russian Government
- The many other countries and peoples where displacement due to humanitarian crises and environmental disaster are ever present, such as Afghanistan, Syria, Myanmar, Pakistan, Venezuela, Haiti, the Uighurs in China, and more.
- And, of course, the continued oppressive systems in place that continue to negatively impact the lives of Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, Arab, and other people of color in the USA (and beyond).

Why am I writing this in my outgoing president's letter?

It is Because We Are All Connected

We, as evaluators, are people, and as people, we are all interconnected. When there is an injustice, we all get hurt. And those impacts ripple across geography and time. If you don't feel the hurt, perhaps it is because the privileges you hold allow you to disconnect from that human connection. And if that resonates, take this opportunity to reflect and take meaningful action to reignite that sacred connection we all share.

I felt inspired to write this because of MNEA's new vision statement, which is: *The Minnesota Evaluation Association (MNEA) envisions a collaborative community where evaluators help build a more just and equitable society to ensure the liberation of all.*

As evaluators, we sometimes find ourselves in places of power. Either in the process of data analysis, writing reports, or being in a room where decisions are being made that will directly impact vulnerable communities. It is during these times of power and influence where it is essential we don't forget our shared humanity.

I invite you to help make MNEA a more collaborative community, where evaluators can work together to build a more just and equitable society.

MNEA Accomplishments & 2023 Annual Report

I am proud to say that the MNEA board accomplished A LOT in 2023, which was only possible by the work of the collective work of current and past board members. Some of the things we did are:

- Updated our mission, vision, values, and equity statement
- Hosted MNEA's first conference in recent history: EVALUATION (UN)FILTERED
- Created the Community-funded membership, which is an evolution from the COVID-19 free membership from 2020 (which sunsetted December 1, 2023).
- Increased our Annual membership fees to help offset increasing costs

Want to hear more about what MNEA was up to in 2023, read our [2023 annual report!](#)

Our Outgoing & Incoming Board Members

I want to thank our outgoing board members for their AMAZING work in 2023:.

- **Spectra Meyers** has been our Communications Co-Chair since 2020, and is a main reason the Evaluation Unfiltered Conference went so smoothly! Spectra, your attention to detail and your positive vibes will be missed and always remembered.
- **Elizabeth Taylor-Schiro** has been with MNEA since 2019. First as a Student Representative and then as President. Elizabeth has been a visionary for MNEA and is one of the main reasons we updated our vision, mission, values, and equity statement. We will miss your guidance, easy-going energy, and passion for reflexivity and wellbeing.

I also want to uplift the new board members who I am so excited to get to work with in 2024!!

- **Jennifer Aranda**: Communications Co-Chair.
- **Ashley Estrella**: Membership Co-Chair
- **Molly Illes**: Program Co-Chair

- **Ivory Love:** Student Representative
- **Kylie Nicholas:** President-Elect

I will end with a Celtic tradition—I'm an Irish lass, after all!

The winter solstice, Meán Geimhrídh (pronounced “Mawn G-ev-ree”) in Gaelic, is a sacred time for many peoples all over the world. In Ireland, the people who celebrate the Celtic Solstice spend this time with close friends and family (bio or chosen), engaging with fire (from a fireplace or candle), and sharing meals. The short days and long nights are also an important time for meditation and completion. And for those who are hardcore, they will stay awake all solstice night to celebrate the beginning of lights return at sunrise.

This Solstice, I spent the morning of solstice reflecting and attuning, and the evening in community making art, sharing food, and celebrating this sacred time with friends and loved ones. I hope you make time to reflect and celebrate as well!

In Community,

Molly O'Connor
MNEA President, 2023

P.S., It is important to note that the words shared above are from my perspective only.