

Region 2 Board Candidate Questionnaire - Sarah Ruiz

Why are you uniquely qualified to represent Region 2?

I have been an MQG member and Region 2 resident for nearly a decade, and have a long history of active participation in the MQG community both locally and nationally. My experiences as an individual member, local guild member, volunteer, contracted pattern designer, and QuiltCon faculty member combine to give me above-average insight and understanding of how the MQG operates, and some of the ways it has changed since its founding. In considering this current opportunity, I also spoke with Executive Director Karen Cooper, Board Chair Heather Kinion, and current Region 2 rep Mary Anne Williams to understand the roles and responsibilities of being a board member.

I bring a solid mix of technical and creative skills to the MQG board and Region 2. I am goal-driven and focused with a proven history of getting things done, both in my professional engineering career and in my quilting business and personal work. I have experience with everything from time-critical space station flight operations to finishing deadline-driven quilt projects. These two things may seem like apples and oranges, but they are both important in their own ways to the people who care about them, and my success is a result of always striving to fulfill any commitment that I make.

I do my best to be a positive, friendly, helpful, and open member of the MQG community, both in person and via social media – and despite the pitfalls of social media, it has been a wonderfully effective way for me to meet new quilters, develop true friendships, and engage with those outside my own creative and geographic bubbles. These connections and insights will also be a great benefit as the new Region 2 board member.

How would you solicit input on issues from Region 2?

Region 2 currently encompasses ~2600 members and 24 guilds spanning 12 states! It's a large area, with a lot of people, and I want to ensure that every member has the opportunity to have a voice on both Region 2 issues and broader MQG concerns. I learned from Karen Cooper that current board members set a goal of 2-3 communications with their region per year, conducted via town halls and emails. I am committed to sustaining that goal initially, and will assess the need for more frequent communication – or communication by different means – as I grow into the board member role. Additionally, I always welcome input by any method, from email to direct messages on social media to Zoom calls, and would be happy to conduct virtual visits with Region 2 guilds and groups.

What is your history of service?

I have been involved in several interest-based organizations in the last 20 years, including but not limited to the MQG. I am an active member of both Houston-area MQG chapters, and served on the Gulf Coast MQG board as Vice President in 2019 and President in 2020. My GCMQG responsibilities at one point or another have included nearly everything involved in running the guild – I handled meeting logistics, compiled monthly newsletters, planned meeting programming, reviewed the budget and finances, and conducted board meetings and general member meetings. After rotating off the GCMQG board in 2021, I continue to run specific activities such as program planning and t-shirt/apparel design. In addition, I led GCMQG's QuiltCon charity/community outreach quilt effort in 2018, 2019, and 2022.

At the national level, I have been a QuiltCon volunteer and MQG Swap Fairy. I have also worked with the MQG staff in several paid capacities since 2018, including creating patterns for the MQG resources collection, writing this year's MQG Fundamentals series, and providing a "gallery talk" for the upcoming MQG exhibit at the International Quilt Festival.

Between ~2002-2006 I helped organize the annual Yuri's Night space exploration celebration in Houston, and founded the Yuri's Night 5K fun run. As fun run organizer, I did everything from the ground up including securing permits, gathering volunteers, setting a budget, serving as the primary point of contact for everything on race day, and ensuring that the race proceeds were donated to charity as advertised.

Between ~2004-2011 I was a founding member and officer in Bay Area Multisport (BAM), a non-profit club for triathletes in the Houston/Galveston, TX area. We worked within the community to plan events, provide training opportunities for members, and promote the sport.

Describe your leadership style.

I am high energy, hard-working, and enjoy taking the lead on projects that I care about. Working efficiently and effectively is important to me; this can mean different things depending on the task at hand, but I have found that it nearly always includes 1) implementing and maintaining strong lines of communication, 2) assessing issues calmly and pragmatically, and 3) working together as a team to build consensus. When it comes to working with teams, the most valuable takeaways I've had from many leadership training courses in my career has been learning to identify the styles of other team members and developing methods to work effectively with others whose style differs from my own.

I use all of these leadership skills daily in my professional role, where I am responsible for accurately assessing technical risks on a multi-billion dollar spaceflight program – but I also use them as a leader in my quilt guild. The two contexts are quite different, but I've found that my leadership skills can be tailored to many different situations and teams as long as I stay flexible and adaptable. I would bring all of these skills with me to the MQG as a board member.

What other unique skills and/or perspective do you feel you would bring to the MQG board?

I've experienced the MQG from many perspectives, which will benefit me as a board member. I joined as an individual member, and participated solo (or via social media) for several years. When the new Gulf Coast MQG chapter formed a few miles from my home in early 2018, I jumped at the chance to finally make real-life connections and have never regretted it.

I have worked with the MQG as a designer since 2018, and have now created several patterns and written multiple articles for the MQG's quarterly publications. In 2022, I added another aspect to my relationship with the MQG by becoming a faculty member for QuiltCon and the upcoming MQG Sessions. I've volunteered at QuiltCon, and served as a MQG Swap Fairy, watched webinars and participated in fabric challenges.

I care deeply about this organization, and am excited about the opportunity to work with the MQG in a new context as a board member.

How would you de-escalate a public situation?

Over the last decade, I've watched the MQG address several public conflicts within the community – sometimes effectively, and sometimes less so. As a board member, I would work to uphold the values and policies of the organization while addressing member concerns and grievances.

De-escalation options can vary greatly depending on the specifics of the situation. It can be necessary to speak out or stay silent, take the high road or get deeply involved in the issue. I generally favor pausing for a breath (literally or figuratively) and allowing all parties to have space before moving forward.

Once any immediate anger or danger has been addressed, my goal is always to listen objectively to all parties, and work to be polite but clear in my own communication and explanations. Not every argument carries the same weight, but I try to recognize the merit of each while firmly stating my own stance and the reasoning behind it.

How would you handle conflict resolution?

In my professional life, my organization recognizes that conflict is a natural occurrence in large groups, and can have both positive and negative connotations. My agency has a formal process for disagreement and dissent resolution that is well documented and taken very seriously at all levels from working engineers to top agency management. As part of this process, communication is key – and this is true for all conflicts, including those faced by the MQG and its members.

When conflict arises, I first strive to actively listen and understand, and acknowledge that feelings of hurt or distress are valid even if/when they may not be fully supported by valid thought or argument. I encourage all parties to share those feelings and thoughts as we work toward a solution. Depending on the situation, I may also look to external resources for help, such as an independent 3rd party or trained conflict mediator. It is not always possible to reach full agreement, but my goal is always to conclude a conflict with common understanding and respect.

How would you embrace diversity and encourage inclusivity in Region 2?

I firmly believe that all voices have a place in the MQG community, and as a board member, my virtual door will always be open. The MQG website clearly states that a goal of the organization is to “foster a vibrant and inclusive organization built on encouragement and mutual respect, where all feel welcome” and I wholeheartedly echo this sentiment. Many of us have had experiences with various forms of the “quilt police” and I have zero interest in harboring that attitude within Region 2 or the larger MQG.

As a board member, I would first work to fully understand the policies and initiatives the MQG currently has in place. I'd like to seek opportunities to reach out to new communities and provide helpful resources – assistance to underrepresented guilds, scholarships for membership or QuiltCon, or many other to-be-identified ways to support marginalized groups. The modern quilting community is often regarded as being more diverse and inclusive than the broader quilting community, but there is still significant room for growth.

What do you love about modern quilting?

In two words – creativity and community. For me, modern quilting represents an idea in addition to our physical creations. Modern quilting embraces the spirit and lessons of the past and uses that knowledge to move beyond traditional styles or values to explore what is possible. I embrace the idea that "modern quilting" has existed in many forms throughout time, and that it has and will continue to evolve and change in the future.

Those changes are driven by the fact that modern quilting – and quilting in general – is tied to the people who create, and all the strengths and weaknesses inherent in that community. I am regularly inspired by the sharing, helping, giving spirits of the many people I have met in my 10+ years as a quilter. As our community continues to grow, it's important to me that we avoid being overly prescriptive about what modern quilting is, and strive to maintain the open mind and learning mentality that have been a key part of our community thus far.

What color do you have the least of in your stash?

Brown, though in recent years I've come around to the usefulness of a good coffee or chestnut hue! I'm also surprisingly short on good purple fabrics – not too much pink, not too much blue, just a nice, true purple.

Which quilting book, blog, or magazine has been influential in your quilting journey and why?

Blogs played a key role in my quilting journey, beginning with an online t-shirt quilt tutorial I used in 2003. After an 8-year break, I returned to quilting in 2011 and quickly discovered the world of quilting blogs. In particular:

- Elizabeth Dackson/Don't Call Me Betsy's 2013 Lucky Stars block-of-the-month helped me learn and hone my foundation paper piecing skills.
- Elizabeth Hartman – via her blog back when it was Oh Fransson – introduced me to the world of patterns/pattern testing with her Pointy quilt in 2014.
- Amy Ellis's Blogger's Quilt Festival gave me opportunities to share my own quilts and blog, and find other people within the modern quilting community.
- Rachel Hauser/Stitched in Color's "30 days of quilt design" Instagram challenge in 2016 was a key part of my growth as a quilt pattern designer.

I have long been a blogger myself and appreciate how many wonderful tutorials and inspiration are shared, both then and now!

What do you think are the next three trends in modern quilting?

- Modern quilting and art quilting continue to mix. I've attended QuiltCon and the International Quilt Festival for 5+ years and have noticed a growing number of quilts that straddle the line between the modern and art quilting worlds. Functionality has been part of the MQG's definition of modern quilting for quite some time, but I think we may begin to move away from

that particular aspect in the coming years as those who identify as modern quilters continue to explore new ideas and embrace quilting as an art form.

- Continued incorporation of technology into our quilting practices in all facets – from learning new skills in a virtual workshop to using a laser cutter to cut intricate fabric pieces. The MQG and its members often leads the way in using new technologies to improve communication, build community, and enhance/expand the quilt-making process and I fully expect this to continue.
- Sustainability. I see a growing awareness within our community of how consumerism affects our quilting practices, and a desire to strike a better balance between the quilts we make, the products that are pushed by the industry, and the associated impacts on our society and our planet.