MINUTES
AAR Board of Directors
Nov 18, 2016  5-6:30 pm
San Antonio, TX


I. Call to Order and Approval of Agenda
President Jones called the meeting to order at 4:25.

II. Approval of September BoD Minutes

Motion 1: to approve the minutes of the September BoD meeting.
Unanimously approved.

President Jones noted that in light of widespread concerns in the wake of the recent presidential elections, the Executive Committee had commended the addition of two extra sessions for the Annual Meeting, one led by a cohort of program units, and the second to be led by the presidential line and the BoD, and framed with a presentation examining the electoral statistics led by Robert Jones of PRRI, and unveiling the AAR values that are newly articulated in the Strategic Plan process. President Jones thanked the BoD on the occasion of her last meeting for its hard work toward the many accomplishments of the last year.

III. Approval of New Working Groups
Pursuant to BoD direction at its September meeting, staff circulated proposals for two new AAR working groups, a Publishing Task Force and an Academic Labor and Contingent Faculty Working Group. A third working group on Professional Conduct is still in the envisioning stage.

Motion 2: to approve the charge and formation of the two new working groups [Publishing Task Force and Academic Labor and Contingent Faculty Working Group] as proposed.
Unanimously approved.

IV. Brief Overview of the Annual Meeting
E.D. Jack Fitzmier reported attendance numbers approaching 9500, exceeding staff expectations. A number of would be attendees had canceled because of concerns about the current political moment and Texas’s Conceal and Carry legislation. That said, cancellations were running lower than the previous year as of Friday. The AAR had sent notices to members about the additional sessions on the issues raised by the election and what it might mean for scholars and teachers in religion. Staff had had conversations with the San Antonio police and the Convention Bureau to remind them that we are a visibly diverse convention. There are additional police officers in the convention center, and there will be additional scrutiny for badges as a clear sign of who belongs in the AAR spaces.
V. Brief Finance Update
Treasurer Jonathan Sarna and CFO Deborah Minor gave a brief verbal financial overview based on the October financial statements, which were circulated in advance, with the following highlights.

- Audit is completed with no significant issues.
- Audit confirmed that the financials presented at the BoD meeting in September accurately depict how AAR ended the fiscal year.
- Membership is running at the same number as last year at this time.
- The cash position is strong
- The budgeting process for the coming year awaits completion of strategic plan, which appropriately will inform it.

VI. The Strategic Plan
ED Jack Fitzmier gave an overview of two consultant assessment reports related to the strategic-planning process.

A. Technology Assessment
An assessment was offered by Techbridge, an Atlanta-based consultant with expertise in nonprofit technology. With full access to AAR technology, Techbridge identified no areas that were coded “Red” for needing immediate attention, but did identify a number of areas for improvement technologically and in terms of planning alignment and governance to ensure that various technologies are aligned and proportionate to with AAR priorities.

B. Communications Assessment
An assessment was provided by Golin, an Atlanta based Public Relations firm, with suggestions toward a clearer message of the AARs narrative and value both for members and eternal audiences, especially related to the considerable energies beyond the annual meeting. AAR communication vehicles can be tailored more to audience rather than program

C. Overview of Process and Progress
The Strategic Planning consultant Terri Theisen gave a presentation on the Strategic Plan, with an overall observation that there were identical values between staff and board, and uncommon consensus on the mission and overall goals of the plan, suggesting a strong basis for further work.

Theisen recapitulated the steps of the anticipated process completed thus far:

- Member survey
- Stakeholder interviews
- Focus groups
- Comparative review of other learned societies
- Priorities review in Feb 2016
- Deep dive into mission, values, goals at September BoD September 2016 meeting.
- Staff input that has been ongoing and, more recently, elaboration of tactics
D. Consideration Mission, Values, Goals and Strategies
Theisen then presented the previously circulated final draft of the Mission, Values, Goals and Strategies generated in the September meeting and led a discussion toward final revisions and consideration of Board approval.

Mission Statement
• Foster excellence in the Academic Study of Religion and Enhance the Public Understanding of Religion

Values
• Academic Excellence and Professional Responsibility
• Free Inquiry and Critical Examination
• Diversity and Inclusion
• Transparency

Goals
1) Cultivate [and support] a diverse community engaged in the academic study of religion
2) Promote the public understanding of religion
3) Advocate for the study of religion and the humanities
4) Create an agile and transparent organization

Strategies to Accomplish Goals

Goal 1: Cultivate [and support] a diverse community engaged in the academic study of religion
Strategy A. Foster pedagogical excellence
Strategy B. Advance research and scholarship
Strategy C. Strengthen regional and international collaboration among scholars
Strategy D. Provide a member experience that benefits [and supports a diverse range] of religious [studies] scholars and professionals
[Strategy E: Offer advocacy and support to scholars who are at risk, consistent with AAR policies and procedures.]

Goal 2: Promote the public understanding of religion
Strategy A. Educate the public through religious literacy programs
Strategy B. Be the go-to resource for media and government agencies
Strategy C. Establish a high-profile online presence

Goal 3: Advocate for the study of religion and the humanities
Strategy A. Support the maintenance and enhancement of religious studies programs
Strategy B. Collaborate with the humanities advocacy community
Strategy C. Strengthen relationships with religious studies professionals working outside the academy
Goal 4: Create an agile and transparent organization

Strategy A. Strengthen relationships with members through targeted and dynamic communications
Strategy B. Anticipate, understand and respond to members’ professional and career aspirations
Strategy C. Increase member involvement throughout the organization
Strategy D. Diversify revenue resources to maintain financial stability
Strategy E. Optimize and align information technology with operations

Motion 3: to approve, the Mission Values, Goals and Key Strategies of the Strategic Plan as amended below, and in principle, to affirm the direction of the working draft of the Goals, Strategies, Tactics document and to encourage the staff and the consultant to proceed to refine the language, implementation details, financial projection and technology recommendations.

Unanimously Approved

Goal: 1 Cultivate and support a diverse community engaged in the academic study of religion
Strategy D: Provide a member experience that benefits and supports a diverse range of religious studies scholars and professionals.
Add: Strategy E: Offer advocacy and support to scholars who are at risk, consistent with AAR policies and procedures.

VII. New Business
There was no new business.

VIII Introduction of New Board members:
The Board of Directors welcomed:
• Laurie Patton, Vice President
• Kathryn McClymond, Program Unit Director
• Leela Prasad, At-Large Director

Meeting was adjourned at 6:10pm.

IX. Adjournment

Respectfully Submitted

Michael McNally, Secretary