



AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

# Self-Assessment Based Review of APA Governance

## Five-Year Report of the Policy and Planning Board

**JANUARY 2021**

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## ABSTRACT

To advance the mission and advancement of the American Psychological Association (APA), the Policy and Planning Board (P&P) is charged with reviewing the structure and function of the Association. This responsibility includes assessing the continuing importance and relevance of the Association's governance bodies and programs. To fulfill this charge, P&P developed a self-assessment process for use by governance groups and programs to reflect on their activities and functions over the previous five years, their alignment with APA's new strategic plan, and strategies for strengthening their contributions to the Association.

We describe P&P's development of this self-assessment exercise, our goals in doing so, the implementation process, and results from governance groups who completed the self-assessment. Despite considerable variability in the mission and work of the 10 participating groups, shared themes emerged across the completed self-assessments. Most groups reported successfully fulfilling their mission or doing *more* than is articulated in their mission. The leadership style of chairs and staff liaisons also emerged as crucial to effective group functioning. Common strategies for increasing group efficiency included regularly updating manuals and handbooks and enhanced use of remote communication. Greater variability emerged in terms of whether governance groups believed that their missions should be adapted to align with the strategic plan. Reflecting on their self-assessments one year after completion, most groups described the process as impactful and as informing their current practices.

Based on our findings, we discuss the utility of self-assessment for organizational functioning, suggestions for strengthening the self-assessment process, plans to extend the process to groups who have not yet participated, and the potential use of self-assessment findings to inform governance structure. We believe that a robust self-assessment process, such as the one P&P has developed, provides information that can and should inform decisions about governance structure and functioning. First, self-assessments offer much needed insight into the alignment of governance groups with the Association's mission and their engagement in advancing strategic goals. Second, the self-assessment process provides valuable information as to whether governance structure, more broadly, effectively advances the Association's strategic goals. That said, self-assessments alone are not sufficient for critically evaluating the Association's governance structure. To help ensure APA's short- and long-term success, we recommend the adoption of an Association-wide, data-driven process for periodically reviewing APA boards and committees and realigning as needed to most effectively advance the Association's strategic goals.

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# Self-Assessment Based Review of APA Governance

## Five-Year Report of the Policy and Planning Board

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Policy and Planning Board and its Governance Review Function

“The objects of the American Psychological Association [APA] shall be to advance psychology as a science and profession and as a means of promoting health, education and human welfare by the encouragement of psychology in all its branches in the broadest and most liberal manner ...” (APA, 2020; [on.apa.org/bylaws-article-1](https://on.apa.org/bylaws-article-1)).

To help ensure APA carries out this mission and utilizes its current strategic plan ([on.apa.org/strategicplan](https://on.apa.org/strategicplan)) in the most effective and efficient manner, the APA Policy and Planning Board (P&P) is charged with “... carrying out its mandated five-year review of the structure and function of the Association.” This responsibility includes “an assessment of the continuing importance and relevance of the Association’s governance bodies and programs...” (American Psychological Association [APA] Rule 70-1.3; [on.apa.org/bylaws-rules-70](https://on.apa.org/bylaws-rules-70)). Further, that Rule goes on to say that P&P “shall make recommendations regarding those that should be considered for sunseting.”

To carry out the current iteration of this mandated five-year review, the 2018 P&P Board engaged with other governance boards to establish a self-assessment process rather than P&P carrying out an independent evaluation. P&P envisioned this collaborative process as the beginning of an ongoing, consistently applied method for informing future reviews of APA’s governance structure and function.

It bears mentioning that one of P&P’s prior five-year governance review reports, prepared in coordination with a Blue Ribbon Panel composed of P&P, Board of Directors, and Finance Committee members (APA, 2000), also used a data-based approach. That effort was designed to “gather and review information ... seek consultation with relevant bodies, and ... make recommendations regarding (a) inequities between current mission and ideal view, (b) unmet needs, (c) areas for cost containment, and (d) future directions and issues” (APA, 2000, p 894). A detailed summary of the process, findings, and recommendations of that report is beyond the scope of this report; however, interested readers are encouraged to review this material to obtain a deeper contextual understanding of ongoing efforts to use data-driven approaches to strengthen APA’s governance programs. P&P will refer to findings and recommendations from the 1999 report in this current, 2020 five-year report. While not an activity of P&P, P&P also recommends that interested readers review the process, findings,

and recommendations of APA’s 2011 *Good Governance Project* to review more recent evaluation efforts aimed at improving APA governance effectiveness and efficiency; [on.apa.org/ggp-2011-dec-report](https://on.apa.org/ggp-2011-dec-report).

#### Brief Overview of the Self-Assessment Process

To carry out the present review of governance, P&P developed a process to be carried out by individual governance groups that included completion of a questionnaire (called a “survey” in this report) by individual group members, followed by group discussion and reflection of the results. This process was developed, with input from governance boards, to allow each group to review how it believes its work advances APA’s strategic plan. Groups were asked to assess their own efficiency and the effectiveness of their contributions to APA governance, including policies shaping the future of psychology and the Association.

Before P&P asked the “Association’s governance bodies and programs” to conduct their own self-assessment (planned for Spring 2019 after the APA Council of Representatives ratified a new APA strategic plan), P&P piloted the self-assessment process on itself. This was the second phase of a 2-year self-assessment carried out by P&P. The first phase, described in P&P’s 2017 Annual report ([on.apa.org/2017-policy-report](https://on.apa.org/2017-policy-report)), was designed to review P&P’s history and its role as a “policy and planning board” during APA’s process of transformation while looking to the future. As P&P noted in its 2017 report, the goal of this 2-year process was to use a data-based approach to address “what P&P can do to further maximize its contributions to the future of our Association.”

While collating and reviewing the results of its own members’ self-assessment responses, P&P members also reviewed the self-assessment process and the survey content. Our goal was to improve the survey for clarity, comprehensiveness, and to maximize the usefulness of data collected for sparking group discussion and self-reflection.

P&P shared its own self-assessment results to model the process and the structure of a self-assessment report. The purpose of doing so was to encourage consistency in reporting and ensure usefulness of the results to each governance group and the Association at large. The method and results of P&P’s self-assessment are documented in our 2018 annual report ([on.apa.org/2018-policy-report](https://on.apa.org/2018-policy-report)).

P&P refined the self-assessment exercise and in 2019, 10 additional governance groups participated in the process. The original intention was to further refine the process based on the experience of those groups before extending the self-assessment

to remaining boards and committees in 2020. This would have allowed P&P to review the Association's entire board and committee structure using a complete compilation of self-assessment results. However, given the extraordinary circumstances of 2020, including the pandemic which moved all governance activity to a virtual format in March, P&P did not ask additional groups to conduct a self-assessment. Instead, contents of this report are based on the 10 groups who participated in the 2018-2019 time period.

## Report Overview

The following sections describe the self-assessment process in more detail, summarize the results of the self-assessments conducted in 2018-2019, and provide an evaluation of the process. The final sections of this report are forward-looking, briefly discussing plans for extending the self-assessment process to groups that have not yet participated and exploring the question of how the Association can most effectively promote and ensure effectiveness of its governance bodies. We conclude with a call to create a systematic, data-based process for periodically reviewing APA's board and committee structure and realigning as needed to most effectively advance the Association's strategic goals.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

### Goals

As required by Rule 70-1.3, P&P is charged to review all governance groups and thus, to review all self-assessments completed by boards and their committees in this current process. While Rule 70-1.3 requires P&P to "make recommendations regarding those [governance entities] that should be considered for sun-setting," this was *not* P&P's intent in the current process. Instead, P&P's goal was to use these self-assessments to assist each board and committee ("governance groups and programs") with their own future planning and activities, and for P&P to synthesize the findings to inform strategies for building a strong APA future.

As such, our intention was to satisfy P&P's mandate for its 5-year governance review by asking governance groups to make recommendations to themselves through:

- Self-reflection on their group's activities and functioning over the previous 5 years
- Examining their group's mission in light of APA's new strategic plan
- Thinking about how their group can drive the strategic plan forward

## Development of the Method

As described in P&P's 2018 annual report, a work group within P&P formulated a series of questions to include on a short survey. The group reviewed literature on the function of governance groups and P&P served as its own focus group to determine categories of group activities, important outcomes, and actual questions to be included. P&P built on the tenets of the APA Good Governance project, attending to how governance groups are aligned with APA's strategic goals, efficiency and agility, and contributions to advancing APA's mission ([on.apa.org/ggp-2011-dec-report](https://on.apa.org/ggp-2011-dec-report)). P&P members reviewed the initial questions, provided feedback, and prepared a draft survey. P&P's chair then contacted other board chairs, explained the upcoming review, and asked for their engagement in the process by reviewing the draft materials and providing feedback to help make it most useful for their own self-assessment.

P&P revised the survey based on feedback from the other boards and its own further review, then used this draft for its own self-assessment. Each P&P member completed the survey and the results were collated. P&P then met in person to review and reflect on the survey results. At the same time, P&P also discussed changes to the self-assessment process, including survey content, in preparation for future use. These changes primarily involved tightening the focus and reducing the length of the survey. The resulting survey included 37 questions with a mix of fixed and open response formats and covered the topics shown in Figure 1. The full survey is shown in Appendix A.

FIGURE 1

### Areas covered by self-assessment study survey questions (2018-2019)

#### Mission

#### Operations

- Procedures
- Nomination Process
- Liaisons and Observers
- Committees and Subcommittees

#### Impact

- Primary Mission
- Ancillary Responsibilities

## Determining Participants

The Association's governance structure is depicted in Appendix B. P&P's original plan was to ask other boards and committees to conduct the self-assessment exercise in 2019. Concerned that the process was new and the potential strain of simultaneously engaging over 40 groups, P&P selected a smaller number of participants for the next iteration. Specifically, P&P asked the six other boards, the Finance Committee, the Council Leadership Team (CLT), and the Board of Directors to execute the self-assessment process in 2019 (see Figure 2). P&P considered including the Council of Representatives but chose not to do so. P&P was mindful of related work being carried about by the Council Effectiveness Work Group (CEWG) and believed our self-assessment process may not be well-suited for a group with over 170 members.

Having identified participants for 2019, P&P's plan was to (a) write a brief report to summarize what was learned from the 2019 self-assessments, (b) revise the process if needed, and (c) extend the process to the remaining committees in 2020. As previously noted, this extension to committees was postponed as a result of the COVID pandemic.

## Guidance and Support

In May 2019, P&P requested participation from these selected groups in writing, then provided detailed instructions and opportunity for Q&A in a webinar conducted in June 2019. P&P's 2018 annual report, documenting our process and results, was provided to illustrate the process. Some groups requested additional counsel on the process, but most did not. APA staff liaisons managed the survey data collection and analysis for each group. Completed self-assessment reports were due to P&P at the end of December 2019. The basic steps in the process are summarized in Figure 3. The Board of Professional Affairs, which was being substantially restructured during this timeframe, declined to participate citing other pressing business at the time.

FIGURE 2

### Groups asked to participate in P&P's self-assessment process (2018-2019)

- Board of Directors
- Council Leadership Team
- Finance Committee
- Board of Scientific Affairs
- Board of Professional Affairs\*
- Board for the Advancement of Psychology in the Public Interest
- Publications & Communications Board
- Board of Educational Affairs
- Board of Convention Affairs
- Membership Board
- Policy & Planning Board

\*Unable to participate as requested.

FIGURE 3

### Self-assessment process overview

#### Gather and compile information

- Identify key background documents
- Identify survey respondents
- Complete the self-assessment survey
- Summarize survey results

#### Group review and discussion

#### Develop conclusions and documentation

## 2018-2019 SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The groups that completed self-assessments developed reflections on their missions, efficiency, and effectiveness. Results varied considerably, reflecting the unique roles of each group, and approaches to the exercise varied as well. Results of the individual groups' self-assessments are summarized here, followed by themes and reflections on the collection of self-assessments. P&P met to review and collate the submitted materials.

### Summary of Individual Group Self-Assessment Results

**Policy and Planning Board (P&P).** P&P committed to more purposeful recruiting and slating of new members with relevant experience in strategic planning and in organizational or consulting psychology. This strategy is particularly relevant given its major responsibilities to assess the overall capacity of APA to fulfill its mission, to consider short- and long-term implications of APA policies, among other responsibilities, such as maintaining APA policies. P&P identified a need to improve its onboarding and orientation for new members. In keeping with its charge to support the functioning of boards and committees, for the first time P&P initiated a systematic process for evaluating the effectiveness and productivity of individual governance groups. The first stages of the process are the substance of this report. Since P&P's annual reports are no longer published in the *American Psychologist*, P&P determined that it should explore new ways to disseminate its mandated annual and five-year reports to the membership. P&P noted the following additional needs: (a) to continue to communicate P&P's role within APA, and (b) to be more proactive in embracing its role as specified in APA's bylaws and Association Rules.

**Board of Directors (BOD).** BOD noted positive achievements, among them the integration of the c3/c6 organizations, effective management of the Trial Delegation, supporting Masters' level accreditation, collaborating with the new CEO, improving its focus on strategic initiatives and leadership, and implementing changes from the Hoffman Report. The BOD recommended better metrics to gauge the impact of their work, addressed the challenges of aligning both their mission and the APA's strategic plan(s), and described shifting from an operational focus to a more transformational, strategic, and forward-thinking role. The board considered the question of more frequent meetings, improving on-boarding and team-building processes, defining the process and mission of internal working groups, updating the board manual, providing background/context for board agenda items and a clear goal for each item, and clarifying the role and value of liaisons.

**Council Leadership Team (CLT).** CLT noted significant contributions in its first five years since being established, including enhancing orientation for new Council members, engendering a positive culture and civility in Council meetings and on the list-serv, and improving the responsiveness of Council to concerns

about diversity and inclusion. CLT planned to review its charge in Association Rule 6O-1.1e to align it better with their actual work, clarify the roles of the "ex-officio" members, clarify the role of the Agenda Planning Group, and develop and distribute meeting minutes to Council members to improve timely communication and transparency.

**Finance Committee (FC).** FC noted its contributions and effectiveness as including increased informational sessions for Council (often in virtual webinars), managing the Trial Delegation, assisting with the c3/c6 integration, and moving toward a more strategic "big picture" role in APA. Measurements of its success included the frequent incorporation of FC recommendations into APA policies, the overall financial health of the organization, and the satisfaction and trust expressed in surveys of Council and the BOD. The committee suggested expanding their mission to (a) explicitly include the work of providing informational resources to governance groups and (b) acknowledge the role of the FC as a bridge to both Council and the Board of Directors, while maintaining its independence from both. They planned to increase onboarding practices for new members and to develop written leadership procedures and operating rules beyond their current member orientation manual.

**Board for the Advancement of Psychology in the Public Interest (BAPPI).** BAPPI oversees the work of eight public interest committees. Members noted contributions of numerous public interest resolutions, practice guidelines, and coordination of task forces and work groups. The board reflected that much of their time is spent in oversight of their committees rather than in more proactive work. Given the array of projects and initiatives that could be developed related to public interest, BAPPI discussed how to prioritize their work. They noted a desire to increase role clarity for liaisons and monitors and discussed the potential of expanding their relationships with Divisions and State, Provincial, and Territorial Associations (SPTAs).

**Board of Convention Affairs (BCA).** While its tasks are specific and structured in its charter, BCA members agreed that their mission does not fully acknowledge all the work done by the board. An external consulting group provided suggestions to increase its effectiveness. Members suggested the need for greater empowerment to revamp the convention, longer terms for appointed BCA members (currently 2 years), and creation of an operations manual. BCA reported making changes to implement the consultant's suggestions, creating procedures for voting and for moving into executive session, and reconstituting the groups that report to BCA.

**Board of Educational Affairs (BEA).** BEA pointed to substantial contributions over the previous several years, including Master's degree accreditation; psychology's application to schools, postdoctoral education, and conscience clause legislation; psychopharmacology curricula; and the quick response to Argosy University's closure in service of helping students and faculty. Members noted that many of their achievements involved collaboration with other APA governance groups, Divisions, SPTAs,



and Council. Recommendations included (a) revising their mission to reflect the action orientation of the strategic plan and the work of applying psychology to schools/education, (b) improving the effectiveness of their many liaison relationships, and (c) attending to larger sociopolitical issues that should affect BEA processes and priority setting. Members also pointed to the importance of in-person meetings to the success of their work, with virtual meetings serving as an effective supplement to in-person meetings.

**Board of Scientific Affairs (BSA).** BSA has a broad mission, with some members suggesting their mission should include the external focus of using science to advance the public good. Members cited the importance of APA Science Directorate staff liaisons as contributing to their effectiveness as a board. BSA believed their current composition represents the diversity of psychological science. Members expressed the desire to focus on the work that is closest to their priorities, with less time spent responding to requests from other governance groups. Members recommended providing more on-boarding for new members, and they mentioned the lack of metrics to determine the impact of their work. Members listed the retreat of scientists from APA and weak representation of science within APA as major problems.

**Membership Board (MB).** MB noted successful efforts toward greater diversity of board members through slating, work to include affiliated professionals within APA, and more active collaboration with the Membership Office to help increase APA membership. Related to efficiency of functioning, they valued the cross-governance communication fostered through liaison relationships and the use of subgroups to complete tasks. MB appreciated the process of self-reflection related to their functioning and mission. They planned to clarify their mission statement, document procedures to maintain efficiency and continuity, continue regular self-reflection, and enhance communication with other governance bodies.

**Publications and Communications Board (P&C).** P&C cited the importance of strong partnerships with staff liaisons to successfully fulfill their mission. They noted having efficient procedures but needing more time to discuss complex issues. Members recommended revising their mission statement, exploring the possibility of another full-day in-person meeting, and strengthening liaison relationships to enhance collaboration.

## Synthesis of Self-Assessment Results

Reflecting on this collection of self-assessments, P&P identified common themes across participating groups and questions about the current role of governance groups compared to their stated role in the bylaws. Related to their respective missions, most groups believed they were successfully fulfilling their mission or doing *more* than is articulated in their mission. Some described themselves as not completing some aspect of their mission. A number of boards planned to seek revision of their missions after the self-assessment. Responses varied when

groups discussed whether their mission should be adapted to align with the strategic plan. The Board of Directors and Finance Committee seemed most attuned to how the strategic plan impacted their work.

From their discussions of efficiency, groups developed potential strategies to increase efficiency, including using Zoom with video and screen share for virtual meetings and regularly updating the group's procedural manual or handbook. They also noted that the leadership style of chairs greatly impacts group efficiency as do support staff. Use of liaisons, observers, and monitors varied considerably, with some groups finding these helpful and others less so. Some groups noted that liaisons increase efficiency by enhancing cross-group communication.

When asked to reflect on their effectiveness, group responses varied and reflected the unique group missions and cultures. Many noted the specific tasks the group had completed, such as developing guidelines, reviewing cross-cutting items, or working with their associated APA office/directorate to create advocacy materials. Some noted that they reviewed materials or advised on different projects like the strategic plan. Some boards noted working extensively to review and advise the committees that report to them, while others did not mention committee oversight as part of their work. Some boards seemed very integrated with their associated APA directorate and noted projects completed by that office as part of their effectiveness, while other groups did not discuss the APA office's work as part of their own. Additionally, some groups observed that they contributed to culture change within APA (e.g., increasing civility of Council) while other groups noted supporting advocacy efforts to impact national policy. These differences in their self-assessments likely reflect real differences within the APA board and committee structure, the varying degrees of integration between APA offices and boards, and the unique missions of each group. One theme that was evident across all boards, with the exception of the Finance Committee, was the absence of measurable outcomes to critically assess their effectiveness. Although groups can name tasks completed, there are few metrics for demonstrating the impact of those tasks.

Considering the full range of self-assessments, P&P offers several observations and questions for reflection. With almost no measures of effectiveness currently in place, how might each group develop metrics or data to critically assess the impact of their work? The boards' relationships with their committees varied considerably. Given the importance of an effective and efficient governance structure, what is the best approach for defining the role of boards vis-à-vis their committees? Should there be more consistency across boards in this regard? What evaluative role should boards play, including with regard for the continued need for each committee to exist? Given the different structures of boards and committees, could each board develop an ideal role for the board in relation to its committees' work?

Boards varied in how much they reviewed versus initiated policy or projects, and boards' relationships with Council were rarely



mentioned. How does this relate with the original purpose of the boards and committees defined in the bylaws as “advisory to Council”? Are the boards and committees still advisory to Council? Are they now advisory to the APA directorates, or are they meant to initiate policy for Council to approve? The reality of governance group functioning appears to be much more complex than “advisory to Council.” Some groups have strong relationships with specific expertise areas in the field and assist APA in creating policy, advocating for change in U.S. policy and appropriations, and cultivating networks and leadership skills for APA members with these interests (e.g., BAPPI and BEA would fit this description). How Council fits with this work is somewhat unclear.

Finally, with the strategic plan in place, how much should governance groups focus on driving the strategic plan, and what is needed to dedicate more time to strategic priorities? Over time, groups may develop important projects, programs, and awards that continue and take significant time, which may result in difficult choices in prioritizing activities.

### Acting on the Self-Assessment Results

The self-assessments were a major undertaking for P&P to design and field test, and for boards, the Finance Committee, and CLT to complete. Ultimately, each group is responsible for making the most of the process and associated insights into their functioning. P&P hopes that the exercise has led to discussions and plans for each participating group to address their findings.

That said, just as the 2020 pandemic prompted P&P to postpone extending the self-assessment process to committees, it also impacted what could realistically be done in response to findings from the studies that had been completed. Due to these extraordinary circumstances, P&P opted not to offer unsolicited observations, suggestions, or other feedback to the individual participating groups. The P&P chair emailed chairs of the other participating groups in August 2020 simply to remind them of this work and to offer assistance “if you would like to discuss [the] self-assessment process and report or have any ideas, questions, or concerns as we work together to facilitate the smooth and effective functioning of all volunteer groups across the Association”.

P&P was also interested in coordinating cross-group work to address common themes that surfaced in the 2018-2019 self-assessments. P&P had planned to use the March 2020 Spring Consolidated Meetings to work with representatives of other groups to (a) review and suggest revisions to the self-assessment process, (b) discuss how to help governance groups make better use of liaison relationships, and (c) discuss strategies for helping chairs improve their group leadership and management skills. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting took place virtually and it was not feasible to complete the cross-group work at that time.

To make progress on one important matter, P&P drafted a PowerPoint deck about best practices in the use of liaisons by boards and committees. To the best of our knowledge, no APA-wide

guidelines currently exist for working with liaisons. This opportunity to explore the use of liaisons is important because it fosters improved communication and provides an opportunity to re-evaluate APA communication in the context of increased use of virtual meetings. Currently practices vary widely from one group to the next.

Improved organizational effectiveness, a significant goal of the strategic plan, could result from better use of liaisons. Liaisons can facilitate information transfer, and they can enhance collaboration and pursuit of goals. Liaisons generally exchange among boards and committees, but they also could provide bridges with Council, Divisions, and SPTAs.

P&P views the liaisons “job aid” document as a work in progress. We hope that it will generate comments and discussion from board chairs and others concerned with improved communication within APA and will continue to collect ideas and information to incorporate into the tool.

P&P hopes to help address the matter of training for new board and committee chairs, in part by canvassing the Association for available material. At a minimum, relevant training material and job aids could be housed in a central location so as to make it readily available to interested current and aspiring governance leaders. P&P would also be interested in collaborating with other governance entities to develop a more coordinated, planful approach to leader development.

### ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP: GROUPS’ REFLECTIONS ON THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

In the original self-assessment reports, groups noted that the process was thoughtful and led to helpful self-reflective discussions. Other responses indicated concerns and limitations of the self-assessment process, including questions about how the information would be used, concerns about the time-intensive nature of the self-assessment, and lack of full participation in many of the groups. Several groups developed specific recommendations and action steps, and most developed questions for further discussion.

The COVID-19 pandemic was declared just a week before the 2020 Spring Consolidated meetings were to be held. Meetings were transitioned to virtual meetings with no planning time. The work of APA then quickly pivoted to respond to the public health crisis and to racial injustice. Thus, groups’ work together changed in form and content, with all virtual meetings and new collaborative work to respond rapidly to these emerging societal crises.

One year after the self-assessments were conducted, all groups who participated were contacted to provide feedback on the process. Questions focused on whether the self-assessment informed recent activities, recommendations regarding the frequency of assessment and inclusion of committees in the

process, and suggestions for strengthening the assessment process. Six groups responded to our request and we summarize their responses below.

**Council Leadership Team (CLT).** CLT reported that their self-assessment (and the request to revisit it) catalyzed their solicitation of legal advice regarding the possible removal of AR 60-1.1e from their charge (i.e., “provide a recommendation to Council on all motions brought before Council for its consideration”). CLT offered the following recommendations for strengthening the process: (a) designate P&P mentors to facilitate and guide the process; (b) develop a strategy for evaluating impact; (c) encourage discussion of how APA governance groups can become more efficient, effective, and less “silo-y”; and (d) design a process for APA governance groups to provide high-level evaluation/feedback to each other (e.g., providing groups with feedback on how *other* groups think they are doing). CLT recommended that self-assessments be completed regularly but did not endorse a specific timeframe.

**Finance Committee (FC).** FC’s self-assessment contributed to their adoption of several new practices: (a) more effective use of technology, notably using Zoom rather than conference calls; (b) greater bidirectionality of FC’s liaison relationship with P&P; and (c) enhanced efforts to orient new members (e.g., calls with the chair). FC suggested that groups complete self-assessments every three years. FC described the process as time-consuming and requested greater clarity of purpose (i.e., whether the findings are primarily for P&P, the larger organization, or the group itself). If the self-assessment is primarily for the group completing the process, FC recommended individual group participation in generating the relevant questions.

**Board of Convention Affairs (BCA).** BCA characterized the self-assessment process as somewhat influencing their recent activities. BCA is charged with a specific set of responsibilities. Nevertheless, the process was useful in identifying processes that should be reviewed and revisiting BCA’s mission. In terms of strengthening the self-assessment process, BCA recommended greater clarity regarding report length, inclusion of similar questions that can be used for cross-group comparison as well as group-specific questions, provision of assessment criteria at the first meeting to guide discussion. They also recommended doing of a brief annual questionnaire of their own focusing on their perceptions of group functioning. BCA recommended that boards complete self-assessments every three years, and that committees also engage in this process.

**Board of Educational Affairs (BEA).** Although the pandemic limited the potential impact of BEA’s self-assessment on their activities, some influence was noted. During the 2020 Spring Consolidated Meeting, for instance, BEA engaged in a “problem-finding” session that was informed by concerns that surfaced in their self-assessment (e.g., the need for BEA to set its own agenda versus primarily reacting to other governance business). BEA affirmed the importance of self-assessment but characterized the self-assessment process as unsustainable

given that it is both labor and time intensive. BEA recommended that a less intensive process be adopted and built into APA culture. Rather than engage in a major self-assessment, BEA observed that incorporating regular check-ins into board processes could foster significant culture change. For committees, self-assessments could focus on the relationship *between* boards and committees. BEA encouraged P&P to draw on self-assessment results to develop a set of questions that all boards and committees could ask themselves routinely.

**Board of Scientific Affairs (BSA).** BSA’s self-assessment contributed to their decision to prioritize their own substantive initiatives over external requests that can dominate their agenda. BSA encouraged P&P to streamline the self-assessment process.

**Membership Board (MB).** MB reported that the self-assessment process helped them think about how their goals related to the strategic plan. Although they reported that the process “increased our level of engagement and communication”, they also noted that they needed to be more diligent about routinely returning to their self-assessment to take fuller advantage of what they learned. MB suggested doing both a monthly and annual review of results and then repeating the self-assessment process every three years. They advised extending the process to all governance groups and sharing results to increase collaboration across groups. In a suggested improvement, they felt it would have been helpful for P&P to have provided feedback and specific recommendations to MB based on their self-assessment report.

Overall, groups acknowledged that the self-assessment process had led to important discussions and improvements. They noted the intensive nature of the self-assessment and recommended a briefer process they could conduct more frequently. Board members suggested the self-assessment include some standard questions and some questions designed by and for the individual boards.

## Extending the Self-Assessment Process

Preceding sections described the self-assessment process in detail, summarized results of the self-assessments conducted in 2018-2019, and provided an evaluation of the process. It is apparent that the process can be valuable for enhancing group effectiveness as well as enhancing group alignment with APA’s strategic plan. This section of the report briefly discusses plans for extending the self-assessment process to groups that have not yet participated. The original plan to do this in 2020 has been postponed to 2021. Referring to Appendix B, we expect that this will include the Board of Professional Affairs (which was unable to participate in 2019) and most of the groups listed in the two rows of boxes below the major boards.

P&P has learned valuable lessons regarding how to better execute the self-assessment process. As previously noted, we have also received helpful suggestions for adjustments and will seek additional input on refinements before inviting more groups to participate. A key challenge will be to minimize the level of effort

required to conduct the self-assessment while preserving the value of information resulting from it.

In this next round, we need to consider the role of boards in the self-assessment of their constituent committees. Should P&P request committee participation and receive reports or should parent boards do this? Should parent boards exert “parental oversight” and follow-up? This might be effective or considered a hindrance, particularly given decreased funding, increased workloads, and other board mandates. There are major differentials in time commitments for a board with eight constituent committees vs boards with fewer committees that report to them. P&P will work with board chairs to develop this aspect of the process.

Regardless of the role of parent boards, P&P will offer consultation to all participating groups before and throughout the self-assessment.

## THE FUTURE OF APA'S BOARD AND COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

### Where Does the Self-Assessment Process Get Us?

We believe the P&P Board-initiated self-assessment process has been and will continue to be useful for improving the effectiveness of APA's boards and committees, including the alignment of their activities with APA's strategic plans. Naturally, the process can be further refined based on the experiences of the first 10 groups that have used the process before we ask other governance groups to participate. In the future, we hope the process of continuous self-assessment can become institutionalized into the culture of APA. But even then, we will not have done the work necessary to generate specific recommended changes to APA's governance structure. There are at least two questions here, only the first of which is reasonably well addressed by the self-assessment process. First, is the mission of a given group aligned with the Association's strategic goals and is it productively engaged in advancing those goals? Second, regardless of the productivity of individual groups, is the overall governance structure as effective as it could be for advancing the Association's strategic goals?

APA bylaws include the existing boards and three committees (Finance, Ethics, Election), thus requiring both an affirmative vote by the Council of Representatives and two-thirds of the membership to add, drop, or otherwise change this portion of our governance structure inclusive of any detail about them. Association Rules specify the committees that report to the Board of Directors, one of the other boards, or directly to Council. The Association Rules may be changed by Council vote.

Neither the bylaws nor the rules speak to the introduction, merging, or disbanding of any governance groups other than the

bylaws requirement for P&P to review governance structure every five years and make associated recommendations for removing groups. The Association Rules do discuss creation and disbandment of ad hoc groups, but these have proliferated over time sometimes taking on the culture of ongoing committees despite rules intended to mitigate this phenomenon, and at times, even after their stated purpose for coming into being has been fulfilled.

While P&P is specifically charged with making “sunsetting” recommendations, the need for change in governance structure might also appropriately surface from Council, the Board of Directors, or other boards either working independently or in concert. Moreover, P&P does not have the authority to make structural changes unilaterally, although it is empowered to propose bylaws changes directly to the membership. Rather P&P's role is to make such recommendations to Council and the Board of Directors who then are responsible for implementation. *Of note, neither the bylaws, the Association Rules, or P&P procedures specify a systematic process for determining when and what structural changes should be made, particularly as regards changes impacting existing groups.*

Wherever a suggestion for disbanding or otherwise significantly changing existing governance groups originates, it is likely to be met with significant pushback from stakeholders who quite naturally will argue for the continuation of a group. Fears of potential negative consequences will no doubt be raised. This results in a trajectory in which APA governance can only grow larger and more complex. P&P's 2019 report on the size and composition of Council is an illustration of a similar problem that hamstringing the Association's ability to evolve. At best, these circumstances threaten the success of strategic priorities. At worst, the result could be a governance structure that is simply too inefficient and too expensive in dollars and staff support to sustain. These are conditions in which APA currently finds itself – that is, we have a governance structure that is too costly to maintain in its current form and we do not have a clear process for deciding what to do about that. Beyond financial implications, it is necessary to question how much the current structure truly benefits the Association and its members. Some of these issues were discussed by the Good Governance Project and subsequent recommendations to the Council were voted upon to begin the movement towards a more strategic, agile, and effective governance structure.

### What Makes it so Difficult to Reduce the Size of Governance?

It is not uncommon for associations to have procedures in which all groups not required by bylaws are periodically reviewed by the executive board or comparable body. Despite such prescribed steps, structural reviews can easily devolve into a perfunctory exercise that rarely results in any groups being disbanded or otherwise significantly changed. Even when groups are not specifically sanctioned by an association's bylaws and there is flexibility for change, it is not easy to decide what changes to make.

It is relatively easy to add governance and advisory groups, so why is it so hard to disband or reorganize existing groups even when those groups are not mandated through bylaws? Especially in an association as large and diverse in interests as APA, many members identify more with their interest groups than with the mission and interests of the Association as a whole. Thus, the existence of a specific board or committee seems to function as a signal that APA values that group or issue. Showing that the mission of the groups they value are consistent with the interests of the Association is viewed as sufficient justification for the groups' continuation even though there may be other ways to more effectively and efficiently address those interests. The motivation for proposed changes may also be called into question. The end result is that recommending changes may be viewed as an attack on the legitimate interests of others.

P&P's unique placement in APA's governance structure (see Figure 2) and its purposeful design not to represent any special interests are intended to support its advisory responsibility regarding APA's governance structure. As already noted, however, it has limited authority to implement changes and, like other groups, is reticent to recommend unpopular changes to existing boards and committees, especially without a generally agreed upon process for generating such recommendations.

### **Can We Identify Effective Processes to Manage APA's Boards and Committees Structure?**

P&P recommends that APA establish a widely endorsed review process that P&P would (or could) be responsible for initiating and in which Council, BOD, and/or the boards with associated committees share explicit responsibility for reviewing and implementing the process. Self-assessment studies or a similar strategy which asks groups to provide information about their productivity would presumably be an element of the process. Other elements of this process might include the following:

- Using data and/or a clear rationale for how changes would improve the Association's ability to further its strategic goals.
- Developing a mechanism for considering the overall board and committee structure to identify how group missions could be adjusted or merged rather than simply thinking in terms of eliminating groups.
- Recommending changes tied to clearly articulated problems being addressed. For example, these might include costs (actual and opportunity costs) and/or APA's strategic plans (which, by nature, are supposed to enable prioritizing among many otherwise desirable goals).
- Demonstrating how needs originally met by a group have either significantly changed or could be better addressed through reorganization.
- Articulating explicit timelines so that recommendations for structural changes do not get indefinitely delayed in the machinery of Council or Board of Director approval mechanisms.

Alternatively, recommendations for structural changes resulting from a prescribed process could be automatically accepted unless there is an explicit vote to reject them.

P&P is not endorsing any specific strategy at this time, but what could such a process look like? One example would be to use a system similar to that proposed by the 1999 Blue Ribbon Panel (APA, 2000) in which the boards to which committees report would be the first line of review. These boards could be both empowered and encouraged to adjust their committee structure as needed to advance the strategic plan with a finite budget of financial and staff resources to meet those strategic goals. Boards could, for example, have committees that do not have an assigned APA staff liaison or travel budget as a way of stretching their resources. The enormous increase in the use of virtual technology during the COVID-19 pandemic has done much to provide practical experience for meeting without requiring traveling and its associated costs.

A more radical structural review process would be to move to an adhocracy model which could require (for example) remaking the board and committee structure with each new strategic plan. A less dramatic variation would be that most committees are given a life of 6 years (two sets of 3-year terms), then by default the committee is dissolved or reconfigured to meet current priorities. Thus, committee members would presumably join the group with a time-limited perspective. There are some obvious concerns with this model (e.g., potentially too much disruption to enable long-term agendas) but moving toward this mindset could be helpful. Boards, with their defined roles focused on specific core foundations of psychology (science, education, practice, public interest) or key organizational or administrative roles (finance, ethics, convention, membership, advocacy) which would rarely change, could be a stabilizing factor.

Again, P&P is not recommending any of these strategies, but rather noting that an explicit process should be identified. Regardless of the strategy adopted, changing rules and APA culture to set expectations for evolution is a precursor to the success of any process for recommending and implementing change.

### **What's Next?**

When P&P initiated the self-assessment process described in this report, we did so with the idea that it would be an incremental move toward serious consideration of structural changes to APA governance that might need to be made in the future. Unfortunately, given the financial belt-tightening that the Association needs to exercise now, that future is here. In the wake of significant reductions in APA staff earlier in 2020, the Finance Committee has urged the Board of Directors to pursue additional cost-savings through tighter management of the Association's governance bodies through consideration of changes in both their structure and work processes.

How do we move forward as an Association? We think it would be most effective to identify a boards and committees review

process that involves broad input from governance leaders. At the same time, the process needs to be reasonably efficient and not invariably result in avoidance of hard decisions. With the immediate need for change, we encourage the Board of Directors to think in terms of a sustainable process, one whose goal is ongoing alignment with the strategic plan, rather than a one-time strategy to meet the immediate needs of the moment.

We hope that the information and ideas provided in this report help shine a light on a way forward, both in the short and long terms. We do not know exactly how these issues will be addressed in the short term, so we encourage readers to offer their ideas by contacting the P&P Board chair [here](#). More broadly, we invite input from all for whom these matters are important, as there are many APA members who have experience with these types of issues in other organizations with which they work. Together, we will ensure that our association represents psychology in the most impactful way possible well into the future.

## REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association (2000). Changing the way APA does its work: A prospective and prescriptive report to the American Psychological Association, The 1999 five-year report of the Policy and Planning Board and the Blue Ribbon Panel. *American Psychologist*, 55, 892-912.
- American Psychological Association (2013). *Good Governance Project: Recommended Changes to Maximize Organizational Effectiveness of APA Governance*. American Psychological Association.

## APA BOARD AND COMMITTEE SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE (2019)

### Introduction

The Policy & Planning Board prepared questions to gauge answers to assess Board and Committee functioning in three key domains: (a) Mission, (b) Operations, and (c) Impact. We believe that these assessments will be useful not only for looking back at the previous 3-5 years, but for reflecting on ways to maximize each governance group's future ability to advance APA's new strategic plan.

Questions in this survey are organized as follows:

- Mission
- Operations
  - » Procedures
  - » Nomination Process
  - » Liaisons and Observers
  - » Committees and Subcommittees
- Impact
  - » Primary Mission
  - » Ancillary Responsibilities

The questionnaire concludes with several wrap-up questions.

### Questions [All questions included a text box for additional explanation as desired]

#### A. MISSION

Is there a written mission or charge statement?

- Yes
- No

Does the mission/charge statement communicate a clear purpose for your group?

- Yes
- Yes, but it could be communicated more clearly
- No

Is the mission/charge statement consistent with what your group perceives as its mission?

- No
- Yes, but we actually do more than this
- Yes, but we actually do less than this
- Yes

Should your mission statement change to be more consistent with the latest APA Strategic Plan?

- Yes
- No

Do you expect your group's priorities or priority setting process to change as a result of the new APA strategic plan?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Based on your answers to these questions and other ideas or concerns you might have about your group's mission, please offer your overall assessment of that mission.



## B. OPERATIONS: PROCEDURES

How often does your group convene (either virtually or in-person)?

- At least monthly
- At least quarterly
- Sporadically, as needed

Do most members regularly participate in group discussion (e.g., during meetings or on your listerv)?

- Yes
- No

Does your group have written operating procedures that facilitate efficient management of the group's activities and consistency across chairs?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Is your group decision-making process efficient?

- Generally, yes
- Generally, no

Is your group decision-making process effective?

- Generally, yes
- Generally, no

What factors, if any, have impeded your group from achieving resolution on agenda matters?

Briefly describe your experience working remotely (e.g., via teleconferences and listservs), including ways in which you have successfully used technology to maximize the effectiveness of communications as well as inefficiencies you may have observed

What is the minimum number of annual in-person meetings that you believe are required to accomplish your work? Please explain the basis of your response.

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

Based on your answers to these questions and other ideas or concerns you might have, please offer your overall assessment of the effectiveness of your group's operating procedures.

## C. OPERATIONS: NOMINATION PROCESS

Does your group get sufficient nominations to ensure strong and balanced election slates?

- Yes
- No

Are these nominations received sufficiently in advance with supporting materials for your selection process?

- Yes
- No

Please offer your overall assessment of the nomination process your group uses and how it might be improved.

## D. OPERATIONS: LIAISONS AND OBSERVERS

Briefly describe the role of liaisons and/or observers, if any, in your group. Indicate the extent to which you believe they contribute to or detract from your group's functioning.

If your group provides liaisons or observers to other groups, please describe their purpose.

Briefly discuss whether and how the use of liaisons and/or observers by your group might be able to break down silos across various interests within APA, as envisioned by the new strategic plan.

Please offer your overall assessment of your group's use of formal liaison and observer activity to support your mission.



## E. OPERATIONS: COMMITTEES AND SUBCOMMITTEES

Does your group have committees or subcommittees?

- Yes
- No

If yes, is there adequate communication and coordination among these groups and with the group at large? Please elaborate in the text box about ways this might be improved.

- Yes
- Mostly, but could be improved
- No

## F. IMPACT: PRIMARY MISSION

What do you perceive as your group's main contributions over the past 3 years? Consider things like new APA policies, procedures, or initiatives. Please provide a bulleted list of highlights here and provide additional detail as desired in an appendix to your response.

How do you determine success or impact of your group's work? Please provide a brief response here, with additional detail as desired in an appendix to your response.

Has your group worked with other APA B/Cs, COR, divisions, SPTAs, or APA staff in furtherance of its mission? If yes, please provide examples.

- Yes
- No

Based on your answers to the previous questions and other ideas or concerns you may have about how well your group meets this mission, please offer your overall assessment of your group's impact in the past 3-5 years.

## G. IMPACT: ANCILLARY RESPONSIBILITIES (E.G., RESPONDING TO CROSS-CUTTING AGENDA ITEMS, COR NEW BUSINESS ITEMS OR DIRECTORATE INITIATIVES)

Does your group consistently review cross-cutting items from the perspective of its unique governance role?

- Usually
- Rarely

Does your group consistently review cross-cutting items, COR new business items, or Directorate initiatives from a *content* perspective using the expertise of its members?

- Yes, if we have one or members with content expertise, we factor that expertise into our commentary
- No, we generally stick with commentary related to our group's mission

Is it your impression that your group's responses to cross-cutting items are largely unique from or redundant with responses provided by most other groups? Please provide brief examples that are the basis for your answer.

- Yes
- No

Do you have suggestions for improving the cross-cutting item review process?

Based on your answers to these questions and other ideas or concerns you might have about how your group's ancillary responsibilities, please offer your overall assessment of your group's role in the past 3-5 years.

## H. WRAP-UP QUESTIONS

Do you believe that there are unique barriers to the success of this Board/Committee?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, please describe how this is being addressed and what reasonable steps could be made to address and alleviate.

Other than the new APA strategic plan per se, are there future trends or macro issues (e.g., in APA's governance structure or in the external environment) that will (or should) impact this Board/Committee's mission or operating procedures?

- Yes (please specify)
- No

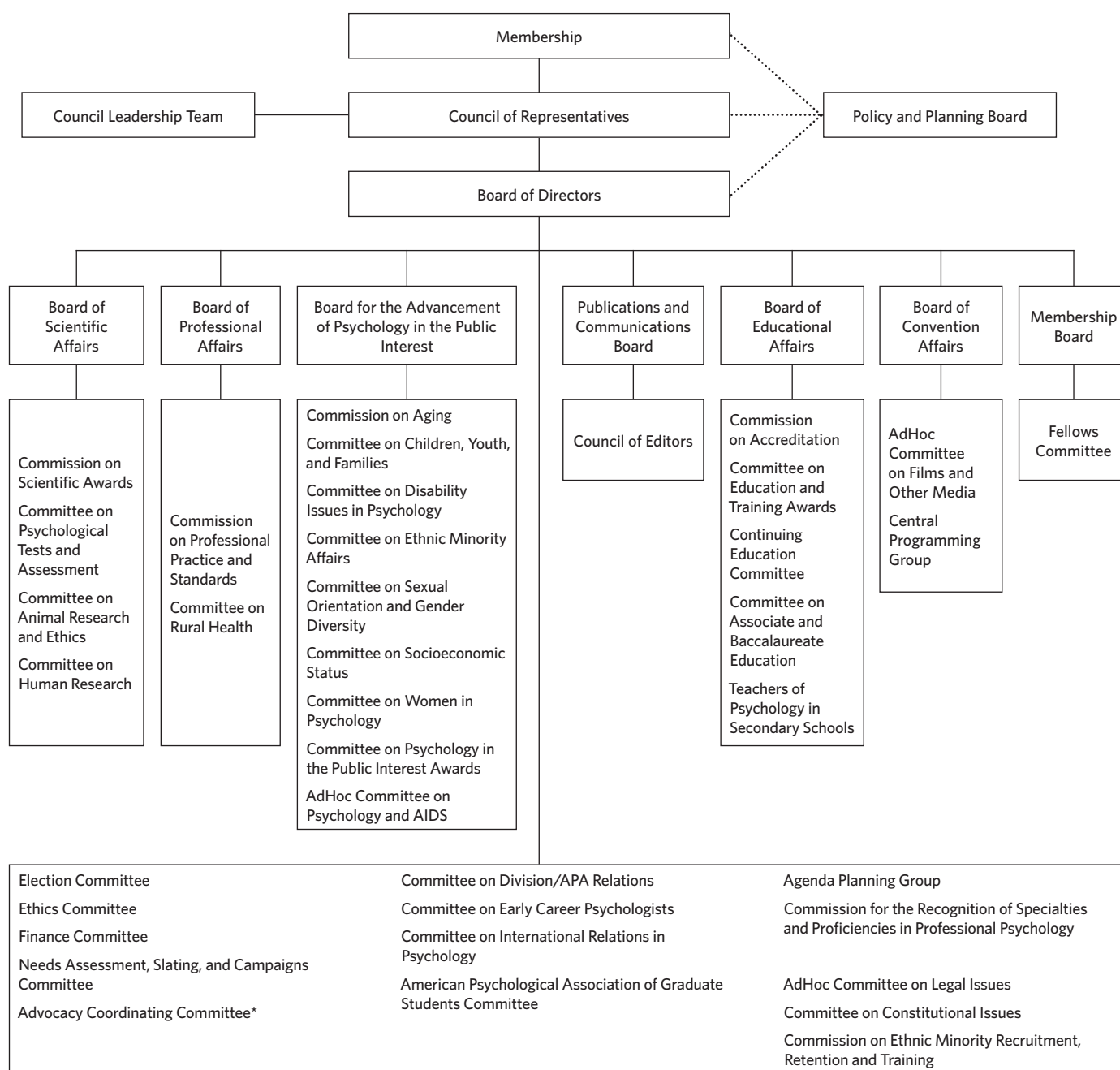
What other information would you want others to know about your board/committee that has not been covered in the self-assessment questionnaire?

Was the process of completing this self-assessment useful to your group? If yes, in what ways?

## APA BOARD AND COMMITTEE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART (2020)

### REPORTING LINES FOR STANDING AND CONTINUING BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

MARCH 2020



\*Committee of APASI



AMERICAN  
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