

ASPB MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING OCTOBER 13, 2023

The main purpose of this meeting was to discuss **plans for Plant Biology 2024** regarding a possible workshop proposal from this Committee.

Leeann Thornton, ASPB President, joined us at the beginning of the meeting and requested that the Committee consider developing a “career/professional development and networking workshop” for PB24 that would be much larger, broader, and integrative in scope than in past years with a particular emphasis on including minorities, travel grant winners and younger attendees. Since other groups like ECPS and PUI will have small group career discussions/networking opportunities, etc., at the conference, Mem Comm could do a larger, more consolidative workshop that would complement, rather than compete with, these smaller groups. And because there is a grant proposal in the works that will help increase travel awards to allow a more diverse group of under-served people to come to the conference, we might plan workshop activities that will support a wider variety of attendees.

Workshop slots will be available early (starting at 7:15a-7:30a) prior to the 8:30a start of the plenaries and in the evenings starting around 5:30p -6:00p. Another possible time slot would be Saturday morning (the day of Plant Science Saturday) before noon. Note that the poster sessions will be scheduled during the lunch periods this year.

The workshop proposals are due November 2nd.

It was agreed that the type of workshop described by Leeann would be our focus for PB24 and a sub-committee to work on the proposal was formed consisting of the following members:

Kathrin _Schrack - Chair of the group
Aruna Kilaru,
Marco Burger
Karen Hicks_
Stephanie Houle

It was decided that the workshop would be 1 ½ hours long and will feature 6-8 topics to be discussed at separate round tables, with attendees rotating through tables at 15-minute intervals. This will allow for five rotations. The rotations would be structured in such a way as to essentially “force” attendees to visit different tables and therefore broaden their networks. We also want to try to make the tables evenly distributed. To facilitate this, a volunteer will be needed to coordinate the 15-minute interval exchanges and help people get integrated should they arrive late.

Regarding the topics for discussion at the various tables, it was suggested that we be creative and include things that will appeal to a wide variety of attendees. One suggested topic was “how to balance work/career and family.” Another suggestion was to include one or two tables that incorporate aspects of careers in industry and not just academia. The idea is to find topics that address what people want to

talk about to “be your best self as a plant scientist” and give attendees the opportunity to explore the different options that they may not otherwise be aware of.

After we have developed some suggested topics, Shoshana will program the database so that those registering for this workshop will be asked to indicate which of those topics they would be most interested in. It was suggested that we also allow for a write-in (i.e., “other”) response. This will help us to determine in advance where the most interest lies. If it lies heavily in one direction, we could have more than one table on a particular topic or we can cut those topics that are not of interest at all. It was noted that other groups/committees (EDIC, PUI, WIPB, for example) have indicated to Leeann that they are willing to help with the choice of topics and Leeann offered to help connect us with others who may have ideas for topics that cover a broad range.

It is important to the Committee that the discussions are very interactive, modeled more like a conversation with questions and sharing coming from both the attendees and the scientists leading the discussions. We should choose topics with this in mind and make sure that the lead scientists at each table understand this approach to networking.

The principals that will lead each table discussion should be seasoned plant scientists and can be recruited from the Membership Committee itself, the Legacy Society, the Centennial Committee, Pioneers etc. but we should also keep diversity in mind when choosing who to ask. Also, a table can have more than one scientist leading the discussions.

Plans need to be made regarding structuring the workshop so that the attendees can find the appropriate tables easily (they are marked well) and can rotate without confusion. It was decided that we not put everyone in strict schedules as many people who register will not actually show up and, conversely, some people who don’t initially sign up will attend. Care needs to be taken so that one table is not more heavily attended than others.

The name of the workshop should reflect the large scope of the workshop. It was decided that something like “Explore Plant Science Careers and Grow Your Network” might be a good title to start with and, if we want to change it after the topics are decided, we could likely do so without much push-back from the Program Committee.

In advertising our workshop, we want to be intentional about lowering barriers so the language around the workshop should make it clear that we trying to help all kinds of plant biologists find their “fit” (i.e., where they belong in the plant biology community) and help them get what they need in order to succeed. This is in keeping with the overall theme of diversity & inclusion.

Our hope is that this workshop will draw 60-70 attendees – a larger number than in the past.

NEXT STEPS:

- (1) Ruth Welti, who – unfortunately -- will not be able to attend PB24, offered to prepare an initial draft of the proposal.

- (2) Shoshana will send a summary of this meeting to others on the Membership Committee who could not attend today to ask if anyone else is interested in being on the Subcommittee and give them an opportunity to participate.

NEXT MEETING:

At the end of the meeting, Ruth Welti made the suggestion that our next meeting focus on the subject of a possible change to the membership dues structure to keep pace with the Council's objective that ASPB be more include and diversity friendly.

Jennifer Covington agreed that the dues structure is an important topic but suggested that there are other conversations that need to be had first in order to make sure that we have all of the data we need before developing a strategic plan that has the best chance of success. Specifically, we need to look at the "Developing Nation's Discount" program and the "Hardship/Reduced Income Membership Application" process and determine what price points really make people act and we need to gather more data about our membership in general. She noted that changing our dues structure has tax implications and also impacts the overall strategic plan of our society.