

Meeting Summary for Membership Committee Meeting

January 22, 2024

In attendance: Ruth Welti, Kathrin Schrick, Karina Morales, Brianna Griffin, Marco Burger, Mohamed Maldani, Aruna Kilaru, Maria Clara
And from ASPB: Shoshana Kronfeld, Jennifer Covington, Crispin Taylor, Clara Woodall and Linda Palmer

The purposes of this meeting were to:

1. Discuss the status of and plans for the PB24 Membership Workshop
2. Review and discuss the success of the Hardship Membership Program
3. Discuss aligning Membership Levels with career levels and job titles
4. Begin to develop a Value Proposition for ASPB membership by exploring why someone would want to be a member
5. Discuss ways in which to add value to Membership

1. Status and plans for the PB24 Membership Workshop

The sub-committee for the Membership Committee's workshop, "Explore Plant Science Careers and Grow Your Network," at the PB24 Hawaii conference in June 2024 is chaired by Kathrin Schrick and has 5 confirmed members which include Marco Burger, Aruna Kilaru and Karen Hicks (present at today's meeting) and Stephanie Houle (not present today). The Committee has not yet met but plans to do so in the next couple of weeks to begin working out the details.

This workshop will be larger in scope than the ones the Membership Committee has done in the past at the PB conference, and the planners envision setting up 10-15 tables for discussions on various topics such as the following (to name just a handful):

- The best graduate school for you
- Landing an industry position
- Handling work-life balance
- Job interviewing
- Doing science at a government lab (as an example of a career option)

The planning committee would like their workshop to be on Sunday or Monday (i.e., early during the conference) as they believe it will be an introduction to the meeting and will facilitate interaction among attendees. In response to that request, and while the Program Committee will be finalizing the full agenda for PB24 by mid-February, Jennifer Covington expressed uncertainty and did not want to make any promises about the timing of the Membership Committee's workshop.

2. Review and discuss the success of the Hardship Membership Program

Shoshana Kronfeld presented the findings of the new hardship membership program with the caveat that we only have two thirds of a year of data so far.

The protocol for applying to the program is as follows:

- Applicants fill out a form
- Two Membership Committee Members review the form and rate using a standard sheet
- A score of 1-5 is obtained and this determines the amount offered.

Everyone who has requested help so far has received something. Nearly half of those offered a discount accepted the offer and subsequently joined. The program was most popular among graduate students, with a smaller number of undergraduates, postdocs, and professionals. As might be expected, a 75% discount was more popular than a 50% discount. ASPB has spent \$705 on the program so far out of a total budget of \$5,000. It was agreed that we need more data on whether to decide to keep the program running. The first hardship memberships will be up for renewal in May of 2024 and it will be interesting to see if they renew.

The complete data presented is as follows:

Program started in May 2023, so data reflects only 2/3 of a year								
Percent discount offered	Number offered this amount	Number that joined using the code	total \$\$ amount discounted	total \$\$ paid by member	number that joined as undergrad	number that joined as grad	number that joined as postdoc	number that joined as professional
25	3	2	56.25	168.75		1		1
50	15	3	90	90	1	1	1	
75	11	7	378.75	126.25	1	5		1
100	3	3	180	0	1	1	1	
Total	32	15	705	385	3	8		2

Countries Applications came from	# of applications from that country	# that joined	how many offered 25% (how many of those joined)	how many offered 50% (how many of those joined)	how many offered 75% (how many of those joined)	how many offered 100% (how many of those joined)	Observations (JC)
Argentina	2	1		1 (0)	1 (1)		75% seems to be the right number
Australia	1	0		1 (0)			Perhaps they would have joined at 75%
Brazil	1	1		1 (1)			50% seems to be the right number
Canada	1	0		1 (0)			Perhaps they would have joined at 75%
China	1	1	1 (1)				25% seems to be the right number
India	7	5		1 (0)	4 (3)	2 (2)	75% seems to be the right number
Italy	1	0		1 (0)			Perhaps they would have joined at 75%
Nigeria	2	1		1 (0)		1 (1)	Perhaps they would have joined at 75%
Pakistan	6	0	1 (0)	2 (0)	3 (0)		
Turkey	2	2			2 (2)		75% seems to be the right number
United States	8	4	1 (1)	6 (2)	1 (1)		
	32	15					

Lower middle income country - all residents get a 33% discount; if what was offered was less, we let them know

It was decided that this program will be reviewed again after we have more data and we will hold action for this year while considering better ways in which to promote it.

3. Discuss aligning Membership Levels with career levels and job titles

A request was made by ASPB for the Membership Committee to provide some volunteers to review various job titles that we have obtained from members to determine and categorize what titles (i.e., Assoc. Professor, Graduate Coordinator, Environmental Consultant, etc.) match best with which ASPB membership levels (i.e., Professional, Undergraduate, Postdoc, etc.). This will help us understand our audience more and, therefore, be able to target our communications

better. Thanks go to Karina Morales, Ruth Welti, Mohamed Maldani and Marco Burger who all volunteered to help with this effort.

4. Begin to develop a Value Proposition for ASPB membership by exploring why someone would want to be a member

Jennifer Covington then initiated a discussion centered around the need to better understand the impetus that causes someone to become a member and stay a member so that we can better articulate those benefits to potential new members. Those present then shared their reasons for joining -- and remaining -- members of ASPB. By far, the main reason for joining (at least initially) was the benefit of receiving a discount for annual meeting registration. The most often stated reason for *remaining* a member was the benefit of networking opportunities, particularly networking opportunities with people they wouldn't normally have met. ASPB's annual meeting was praised by several as being just the right size for effective networking. And membership in various Sections was also stated as being important.

Other benefits mentioned were:

- being able to add membership in a professional society to their CV
- publishing at a discount in the journals (*The Plant Cell* and *Plant Physiology*)
- the many opportunities for early career persons
- opportunities for leadership
- the SURF program
- opportunities for international students

5. Discuss ways in which to add value to Membership

The group then explored other ways to improve membership benefits and improve communication about them. Jennifer proposed using shared experiences to update ASPB's web page, especially for international students.

It was suggested that a potential benefit could be access to exclusive content for members only. One specific suggestion was that the Plantae webinars could be for members only. Alternatively, perhaps the back content could be for members only with newer webinars still being open for everyone.

Another suggested benefit was members-only access to research grants, but concerns were raised about the financial implications for ASPB, and competitiveness of grants and awards for which only members can apply. Ruth wonders if we could partner with Gordon Research Conferences to create plant interest groups around the GRC themes that would help scientists in a specific interest area interact between conferences. This could benefit both GRC and ASPB if there was an ASPB member to do this.

Implementing something like "loyalty programs" was also suggested (e.g., "if you have been a member for x years, you get xxxxx as a benefit").

Piggybacking on the benefit of networking, the group also discussed the potential value of setting up members-only special interest groups and hosting round table discussions on specific

topics. The team also discussed the optimal size for a topically based group with Ruth suggesting that a good size would be around 200 people since this would likely bring in several leaders in each field who can help run the groups.

Starting a mentorship program was another suggestion and it was noted that we already have one in place although we probably need to promote that better. There will be a promotion in the new member packet we are working on.

A discussion was also initiated on engagement levels of people in mid-career as currently, our benefits seem to weigh more heavily towards those at the early career level. It was suggested that we focus on retaining younger generations like graduate students by reinstating incentives such as discounted rates for multiple lab members or having professors pay for their students' memberships, like the Give Your Students Roots program. Crispin Taylor proposed long-term benefits like the emeritus designation and honorary award for members who maintain their membership for a certain period.

Shoshana Kronfeld shared that our statistics show that if we can retain a member for 5 years then we likely have them for life and emphasized the importance of retaining members in the 3-to-5-year interval. Ruth Welti cautioned against assuming that mid-career members are intentionally departing when it could simply be that they have changed career paths.

Jennifer suggested that perhaps it would be helpful to compartmentalize the benefits of membership to certain groups. (For example, if you're an international student, here's why you should be a member or if you're in mid-career, here's why...)

Brianna Griffin, who is chair of the ECPS (Early Career Section) stated that ECPS is in the process of conducting a survey on their members' areas of research and Shoshana asked if she would share the results of that with ASPB.

Conclusion:

Jennifer concluded the meeting by reiterating that the overall theme of today's meeting was how – as a community – we engage and retain members. Jennifer called attention to the need to continue to focus on these issues in subsequent meetings.