

MEMBERSHIP STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING NOTES

February 27, 2025

Purpose of Standing Committee: Members of the Standing Committee are charged with helping to oversee items for the newsletter as well as helping with retention and recruitment strategies.

Quick Recap:

This meeting primarily focused on planning the content for the summer issue of the ASPB newsletter. Strategies to increase ASPB membership and engagement were also discussed. The Committee's plans for their PB2025 workshop and an update on the Ambassador program were also briefly mentioned.

Attendees:

Committee Members and Leadership: Leeann Thornton, Hong Ma, Stephanie Houle, Kent Chapman, Asha Kumari, Chamindika Siriwardana, Mohamed Maldani

ASPB Staff: Shoshana Kronfeld, Jennifer Covington, Linda Palmer, Crispin Taylor, Jayson Padilla, Sarah Black

Action Items:

- For the newsletter, Hong Ma will write in his President's Letter to include the benefits of being an ASPB member
- Shoshana will prepare an article about Ambassador of the Year for the Newsletter
- Stephanie will help with an article on "Leadership Development" where we will have younger scientists interview people who impacted their leadership development in their career.
- Shoshana will send a communication out to the whole committee asking for suggestions of people we can reach out to for an article focusing on a personal experience or benefit that someone has received because of their membership. (This could include perspectives from several people at three different career levels.)
- Sarah's team will work on an article about how ASPB impacts international scientists – perspectives from ASPB members and will contact from Shoshana, working with the International Committee and interviewing them about their ASPB membership.
- Jayson will continue working on the member volunteer spotlight initiative
- Shoshana will speak with Mark about the possibility of requiring a password change in our system less often.
- Jennifer will work with Jayson and team to make sure that our messaging always includes something about membership, diversity and "being stronger together" (using banners, etc.)
- Staff will continue to do things at the Section meetings as an incentive to join onsite

ASPB News and what the committee needs to do for the Summer Issue

The Summer issue of the newsletter is focused on Membership as the theme. In addition to the regular monthly contributions from the Membership Committee (i.e., Spotlights, Articles on Luminaries, Memoriam pieces, etc.), this issue has an overarching theme of ASPB Membership so content needs to be planned and writers assigned.

Newsletter content is due at the end of June and the issue will be coming out at the end of August.

One to three feature articles of 1000 words each on the topic of Membership are needed. The article(s) could center around membership within ASPB or could be about professional memberships in general.

It was suggested that the regional sections submit summaries of their meetings, but these updates are being done throughout the year when it is most timely for them.

LeeAnn suggested that we highlight member opportunities (Why be a member?) but it was pointed out that this is already a membership publication, so it is mostly members who read it. However, Jennifer pointed out that retention numbers are not good so a possible focus could instead set about encouraging people to stay members. Hong Ma said that he will cover some of these issues in his ASPB President Letter.

Sarah pointed out that it would be ideal to have content that discusses personal experiences for membership. For example, in the last issue, they highlighted what an ECR member personally gained from attending Plant Biology 2025.

Kent suggested an “Ambassador” feature and Shoshana said that she will do an article about Ambassador of the Year. Additionally, the Ambassador application is open around December/January and it might be beneficial to do a summertime “heads up” article letting everyone know that applications will open later in the year.

LeeAnn then proposed an article on the value of membership for career and leadership development to include quotes from mentors on how they have developed leadership skills. In that regard, Crispin suggested that we should talk with longtime members, and he offered to solicit some perspective from the Legacy Society when they meet.

Sarah suggested that this idea was compatible with the idea of highlighting “Why I’m glad I’m an ASPB member” in that we could get perspectives/quotes from people who are willing to share how their specific experience with ASPB has particularly benefited them in their field or how networking opportunities through ASPB has made certain experiences possible. She suggested it be done through “storytelling.” And Crispin suggested that it also would be great to get that perspective from mid-career members because ASPB lags somewhat in this area, tending to focus mostly on those who are very early in their careers.

Stephanie offered to help with writing this article and reach out to people to get their perspectives.

Jennifer then added that there also might be an opportunity to highlight global perspectives to emphasize the breath of ASPB. After some discussion it was concluded that the overarching theme of that article would be the value of ASPB membership on an international level.

Sarah also suggested that we strive to include a membership Spotlight of international members from all different countries as a sort of “roundup” and Crispin suggested that there is an opportunity to connect to the International Committee here as well as (potentially) folk affiliated with our existing/pending MOUs with our sibling societies in Canada, Japan, and India. So, the overarching theme of that article would be the value of ASPB membership on an international level. Sarah’s said her team can compile this, working with Shoshana.

Jennifer also suggested an on-going article/feature that highlights the institute’s commitment to diversity and inclusion and Jayson suggested that we strive to convey the message that “we’re stronger together.”

Sarah then summarized decisions made:

- Member News – Ambassador of the Year announcement
- Features:
 - (1) Something on Leadership Development where we have younger scientists interview people who impacted their leadership development in their career. Stephanie said she would help with this.
 - (2) An article focusing on a personal experience that someone has gotten because of their membership. This could include perspectives from several persons at three different career levels. Shoshana will put it out to the committee for ideas for names of persons to possibly reach out to for this.
 - (3) An article about how ASPB impacts international scientists – perspectives from ASPB members. Sarah’s team will work on this one and get contacts from Shoshana, working with the International Committee and interviewing them about their ASPB membership.

Member Volunteer Spotlight Initiative

Jayson mentioned that plans are still in the works to start highlighting people involved within various volunteer areas of the society and it is hoped this will roll out soon. It is an effort to celebrate people who make ASPB what it is. Kent made the suggestion this include staff.

Membership Committee Plans for Plant Biology 2025

As no one was present at this meeting from the PB25 Planning Subcommittee, Shoshana just confirmed that we are going to be doing the following:

- Undergraduate Poster Session
- Membership Committee meeting in Milwaukee

- One-on-one CV review. (Volunteers are needed for this, but there is a small chance that it might be sponsored.)
- Shoshana is planning a meet up where members of the Membership Committee give talks with the Section reps from each section. If you have ideas for other “meet ups,” let Shoshana know.
- We will repeat the networking workshop from last year which was very successful last year. Jennifer added that the Program Committee has decided that the workshops will be over the lunch period this year but is not yet sure when this one will be.

Ambassador Program Updates

The Ambassador Alliance is currently selecting the Ambassador of the Year from the 2024 End of Year Reports and that will be announced as soon as the Membership Committee approves it. We have brought on fifteen (15) new Ambassadors this year to bring us to total of forty-five (45). Shoshana indicated that she is already very impressed with how active the team has been.

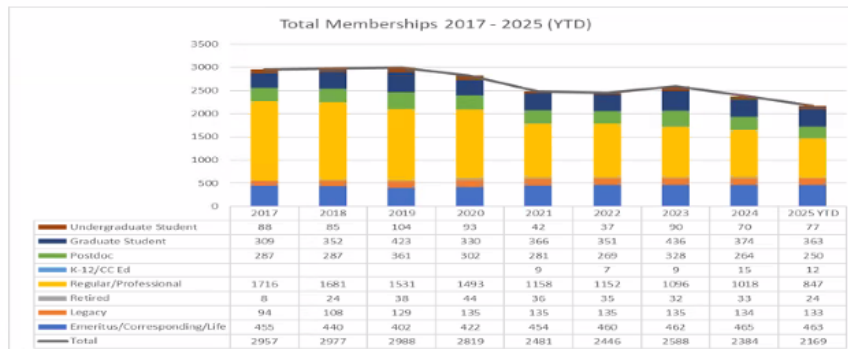
Combating Member Attrition – What the Committee Can Do

Shoshana started this discussion by stating that membership numbers have been declining over the last three years. We had a small bump before COVID but have been declining ever since. The Membership Committee needs to make some decisions about what can be done. Currently, we are emailing people with a “renewal cycle” of emails that has recently been refreshed but it would be great if there is a way to reach people in a more meaningful way other than sending emails.

See the statistics below:

Membership Statistics

- At the close of 2024 membership is at a 5 year **low** with a decline in all nearly all membership levels. The start of 2025 is showing the same trend



3



We believe some of the increase in 2023 numbers was because the meeting was in Hawaii and people became members to get a discount for this meeting.

Kent said it would be a lofty goal but he thinks we could see the numbers double. He suggested that one thing that might help would be to make joining online easier. Our database makes it difficult and having to change a password too often is frustrating. Shoshana indicated that she will discuss with our IT person but, in the past, he has said that we follow industry standards for this.

Kent also suggested that we take advantage of the Section meetings and give people a discount (\$5?) if they sign up on the spot and/or have some giveaways. We will have someone from Leadership and an Ambassador speaking at each meeting and this could help. He suggested that there are as many as 60% of the people at each Section meeting who are not, in turn, ASPB members.

Shoshana said that we gave a swag bag at all section meetings last year (including if you joined within 5 days after the meeting) but it was not a very successful campaign. The only time it was successful was in Mexico was when you just had to join the Mexico section, and we did double their section membership but very few of those people also joined ASPB. We have a lot of swag left over. It was also noted that having large numbers join onsite at section meetings might also cause a staffing issue.

As a new thing this year, we are going to do a scavenger hunt at the section meetings that involve finding things on our website to get people more familiar with the website and learn more things

about ASPB in general. And it will also include an opportunity to join ASPB. It was suggested that we also include the website questions at the scavenger hunt that ECPS sponsors at the annual meeting as well.

LeeAnn suggested that we need to be more specific and “loud” about why we need members. We are more powerful with bigger numbers. In blog posts and in places like The Signal we need more statements about being stronger together.

We could use banners we already have made for this type of thing and Jayson said this could be added to our social media efforts and various blog posts.

There was then a brief discussion of multiyear memberships and lifetime memberships. We already have multi-year membership available, and it was decided that lifetime memberships are not cost-effective.

In summary:

- Jennifer will work with Jayson and team to make sure that our messaging always includes something about membership, diversity and “being stronger together” (using banners, etc.)
- Continuing to do something at the Section meetings as an incentive to join onsite
- Will keep membership terms the way they are