

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING NOTES

July 21, 2026 during Plant Biology 2026

Note by Linda Palmer

ACTION ITEMS:

- **Organizational Membership:** Continue identifying and reaching out to prospective industry and university partners. Point person: Ashok.
- **Mid-career Membership:** Develop ideas to better engage and recruit mid-career professionals (e.g., webinars/workshops, career transition topics, targeted programming). Point person: Membership Committee (I'll be happy to coordinate this discussion).
- **Membership Trends:** Further analyze the decline in professional membership and identify opportunities for targeted recruitment. Point person: Shoshana.
- **Section Coordination:** Schedule a meeting of section representatives to facilitate communication and sharing of best practices across sections. Point people: Shoshana and Laura.
- **Membership Recruitment Materials:** Develop a concise one-page membership benefits flyer with a QR code for Ambassadors and committee members to use during outreach. Point people: Ambassadors and ASPB Staff.
- **Website Review:** Solicit committee feedback once the updated website is ready for stakeholder review. Point people: ASPB Staff and Membership Committee.
- **October Meeting:** Revisit agenda items that were not completed and review progress on the action items above.

Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions (10 minutes)
- Board Meeting or Council Updates(15 minutes)
- Year in review: (25 minutes)
 - Section /Ambassador successes from the year
 - Review Membership Stats
 - Review Hardship program stats
 - Website updates and the coming soon new website progress
 - Other committee activities in progress and successes from 2025-2026
 - Recruitment Materials
 - We need a subcommittee to develop content for level related flyers for membership – what do we offer each level
- ASPB News
 - What articles do we want to contribute in the coming year?
 - What suggestions for improvement do we want to make for the newsletter
 - Any other thoughts

Plant Biology 2026 OTTAWA, CANADA JULY 18-22

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF PLANT BIOLOGISTS

CANADIAN SOCIETY OF PLANT BIOLOGISTS

Welcome and Introductions:

The meeting began with introductions. Some members were in person, and some were attending via Zoom.

Updates from the Board and Council Meetings:

Crispin Taylor reported that the Council met on Friday and the Board of Directors met after that. The most important news is that the Society has engaged a consultant, Bernuth and Williamson to carry out a 360-degree assessment of the organization. This was started about a month ago and is to be a multi-component assessment.

The consultants are carefully analyzing the data from the online survey that we recently wrapped up. We received nearly 700 responses, just over half of which were from members and about a quarter of which were from lapsed members. The remainder of responses was from people who were never members and may have had little past engagement with ASPB. The survey was structured with particular, targeted questions for each of those three cohorts. Therefore, we have plenty of data. One thing that has already emerged from the early assessment was that we need to be better at communicating who we are and what we do to the community as well as beyond. And we get better at making it less difficult to find and accomplish certain things on the website.

The Board and Council will be meeting again this afternoon with the primary focus being a preliminary review of the 2027 budget assessments and recommendations before the staff dives into finalizing those budgets in September.

Aruna Kilaru added that another subject that came up in the Board and Council meetings was the new organization membership program that has been initiated.

Ashok Dang announced that the organizational membership program was approved only recently by the Board and we will be doing more promotional activities. It is a three-tier program for both companies (industry) and universities to join ASPB with this new type of membership. We have already secured two members (OCP North America and Corteva) and are developing a list of other potential prospects. Please let Ashok know if you know of any organization that might be interested.

Year in Review

Here, Aruna provided some context for the structure of the Membership Committee. This is the largest committee that ASPB has. There is a Representative from each regional and topical section in the Membership Committee and a representative from the Ambassador Alliance. The main goals of the Committee are membership recruitment and support.

Ambassador Updates

Maren Arling, Ambassador Chair, said that she is working on building enthusiasm and community within the Ambassador Alliance. To this end, they are using a new Slack channel for conversation and to store pertinent documents in one place. Maren highlighted some of the new activities of the Ambassadors, including mentorship circles with invited speakers, a blog series, and a podcast. She acknowledged challenges with content creation and said that materials are not getting published in a timely manner, noting the need for better structure and timelines. Maren plans to create a document with talking points and is planning training for Ambassadors, aiming to improve one-on-one outreach efforts. This group has grown from 40 to 60 members and many of the members are engaged and presently volunteering at PB26.

Section Updates:

Southern Section Updates

The newsletter has gone out. They have a location chosen -- but not a date yet -- for next year's meeting. It will be at Spellman College in Atlanta, Georgia. They are looking for officers and have already received some nominations.

Western Section Updates

The Western Section is working on starting a webinar series pairing scientists (who discuss their research papers) with industry representatives. Three companies have already been lined up to sponsor these at \$300 each. Also, a planning group is forming now for next year's Bay Area Plant Group joint meeting although there is also some discussion about the possibility of having a separate section meeting in a different location than the Bay Area. The Western Section has their own Linked In page and a newsletter.

Mid-Atlantic Section

The Mid-Atlantic section was at the end of May and it went exceptionally well and was well-attended with 180 registrants – a record number. They had representation from 27 universities and colleges, 12 companies/industries and 5 high schools. There were over 70 posters. There was a very information presentation from an industry panel formed with representatives from NSF, USDA and DOE. And -- new this year -- there were three \$1K prizes for students who gave the best oral presentations from a Maryland Foundation that is very interested in supporting horticulture sciences. There were some “hiccups” with registration which need to be addressed next year. In particular, there was not enough time for the submission and culling of abstracts due to a large number of last minute registrations.

This meeting is always held at the University of Maryland campus in conjunction with UMD Plant Symposium. Aruna suggested that they might want to discuss rotating to different locations but acknowledged that some UMD faculty have expressed their desire to maintain the meeting in Maryland. It was suggested that the membership itself should be polled about this.

The officers of this section plan to discuss doing other initiatives than just the meeting in future.

Regarding the problems with registration that were mentioned, Laura Malaguerra interjected that ASPB staff have been proactively discussing ways that ASPB can help more effectively with logistics for the meetings and how we can help things run more smoothly for the sections.

Mexico Section

This section has meetings only every *other* year. There was no meeting in 2026 but they have already started planning a meeting for October 2027. Their meetings are usually joint with Mexico and the U.S. It is one of the few meetings conducted in Mexico that is completely in English and that is a “big thing” in plant biology community there. A part of the meeting that was particularly successful last October (2025), was an ASPB-sponsored workshop on orphan crops and they want to continue to do similar things in the future. Next year, the meeting will be in Cholula. While half of speakers are from the U.S. and half from

Mexico, currently, almost all the students that attend are post-docs from Mexico and they want to work on ways to attract more students from the U.S.

Midwest Meeting

The Midwest Section meeting location is set for the next two years. Next year is Michigan and the year after, Minnesota. Plans are already underway.

One thing their leadership has discussed is how to have more communication among the sections so that they can help each other with meetings and other initiatives, while not necessarily making them exactly uniform. For example, there has been the idea put forth to give travel awards from different sections to go to Mexico.

Improving Inter-Section and Committee Communication

Shoshana Kronfeld and Laura will set up a meeting for all the section representatives to talk.

Aruna mentioned that the possibility of the section representatives breaking off from the Membership Committee to form their own committee has been discussed. However, it has been decided that all of the sections want to have their own representative with Council and this would not be possible if they were a separate committee.

Hong Ma then added that the Council also has discussed this issue of how the sections can work together and, in addition, how the sections could work with various committees. He highlighted a couple:

With regard to helping the Publications Committee, there was a very specific discussion at the Council meeting about how membership could be tied into publication fees a little bit more closely as we move forward and how publication fees may evolve both with regard to moving to open access and possible changes with regard to government rules not necessarily within the U.S. but possibly with China. It was recommended that the sections, through action with members, work closely with the Publications Committee on ways to highlight the benefit of reduced publication fees that many members enjoy, particularly (and this is borne out in the survey) for senior members who may not be aware of the benefits.

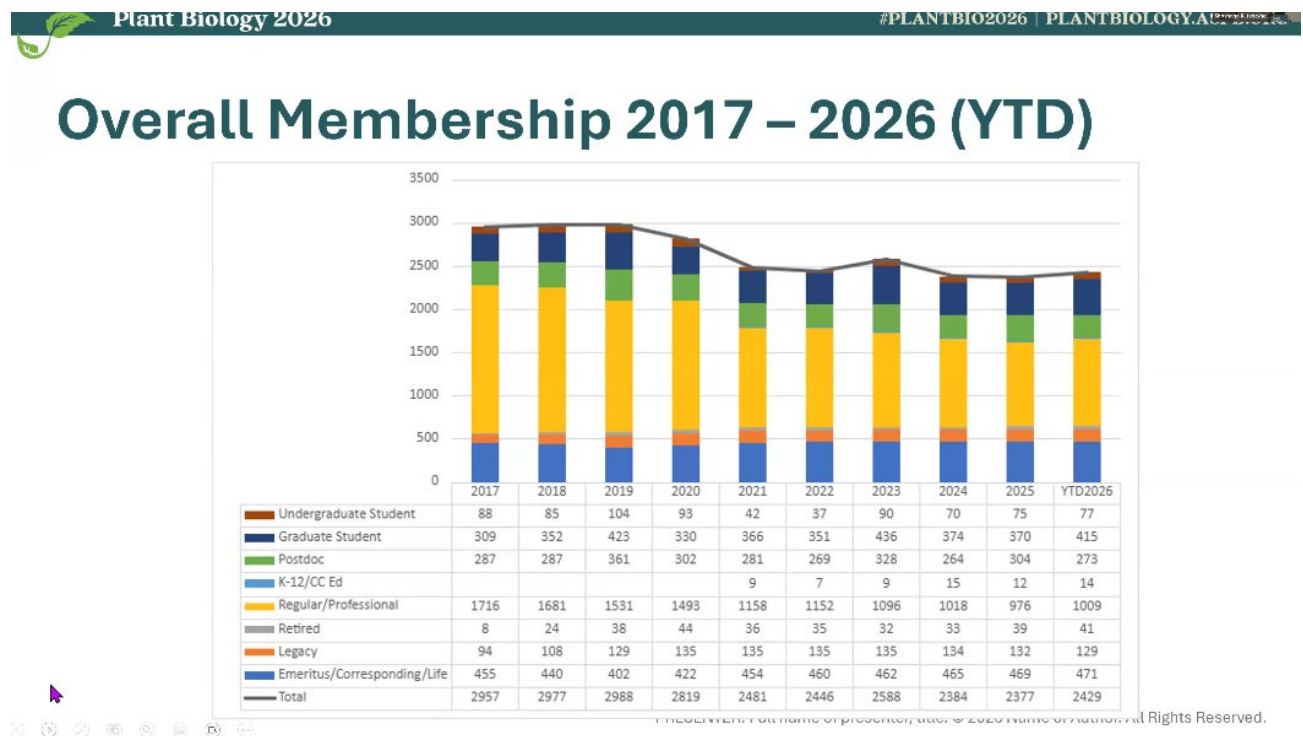
It was noted that younger members tend to appreciate the travel awards and career development benefits.

Hong also said that their mid-career members are not seeing as much of a benefit to being members of the society and he suggested that, as the Membership Committee moves forward with recruitment efforts, they might want to aim specifically at mid-career.

There also might be a need for more targeted recruitment towards international members.

Membership Statistics and Recruitment Ideas

See slide (below) which was shared that shows membership has dropped in the last ten years. However, we are beginning to see some slight increases. The last three years are nearly the same -- with 2026 being slightly higher. It is interesting to note (as evidenced by the yellow parts of the bar below) that the Professional level is getting smaller while the others stay the same in size. This is the middle career people so this bears out Hong's point about the need to focus more on that Professional level.



Aruna suggested that we might do workshops aimed specifically at this group. A popular topic might be on how to transition from academia to industry. If you have other ideas on how to target this mid-career group, let Aruna know.

Marco suggested that we need to dig down into the specific breakdown of that Professional group as it could include members from Professor to CEO. Maren suggested that one way to do this would be to use their email address ending (edu, etc.) to separate out groups.

Someone suggested that we have a look at the decline in plant biology across U.S. institutions, colleges, training programs, etc. and Shoshana is going to take a closer look at that. There are many nuances.

Colleen also suggested that part of the decline may be related to the number of people who are being laid off and/or how many people are leaving the profession of plant biology itself. If people aren't working in plant biology, why target it? Maybe there are also ways to widen this group and target crop researchers, etc.

It was noted that many people who join do so because they want a discount to come to the Plant Biology meeting. And there are now more meetings from other organizations that take people away to other conferences. Are we paying attention to those and how that fits in? Are we discussing ways to keep members for other reasons than conference discounts?

It was suggested that we might have a requirement that you be a member to receive certain rewards (travel awards, etc.) and it was noted that there has been some discussion about this in the past. Would it help, for example, to require someone to keep a continuous membership in order to be eligible for certain awards?

Shoshana added that, in addition to the meeting being discounted, one of the most attractive benefits is publication fee discounts. ASPB is tracking that and trying to figure out how to work on it.

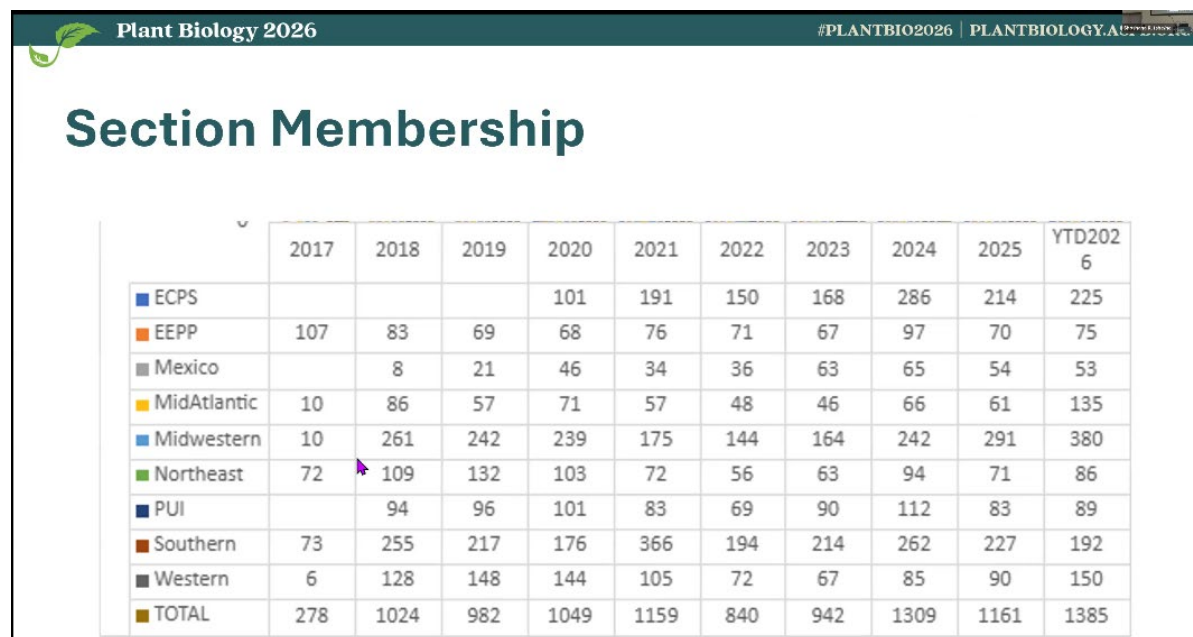
Someone mentioned that a few of Canadian Society members have indicated that they did not know that they could also be a member of ASPB member and there followed a discussion of how to change the impression that ASPB membership is only for people in America. Can we keep the ASPB trademark but somehow make it better understood that this is an international society?

Someone suggested that we implement a joint membership rate for people who are already members of a “sister society.” However, while Crispin praised the idea, he noted that there are logistical problems that would need to be solved first.

Maren then mentioned that people are looking for a place they can meet online, a community and she reiterated that the Ambassadors are working on better ways to communicate this. Maren wondered if we could use the directory for ways for people to find others to collaborate with.

Further to the statistical analysis of membership numbers, it was noted that there is a lot of fluctuation in membership among sections (see slide below) and it was suggested that we work on ways to convert these to professional membership.

Someone also mentioned that we might want to consider forming some other, international sections.



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Section Membership

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	YTD2026
ECPS				101	191	150	168	286	214	225
EEPP	107	83	69	68	76	71	67	97	70	75
Mexico		8	21	46	34	36	63	65	54	53
MidAtlantic	10	86	57	71	57	48	46	66	61	135
Midwestern	10	261	242	239	175	144	164	242	291	380
Northeast	72	109	132	103	72	56	63	94	71	86
PUI		94	96	101	83	69	90	112	83	89
Southern	73	255	217	176	366	194	214	262	227	192
Western	6	128	148	144	105	72	67	85	90	150
TOTAL	278	1024	982	1049	1159	840	942	1309	1161	1385

Laura said that ASPB is possibly rethinking its model and considering making a regional section membership included in the national membership. This could help us help people have a local committee as well.

Janeen Braynen noted that members who join ASPB aren’t always aware that there are regional sections they could join as well. We need to make this more prominent and easier to click on.

Hardship Program

Hardship Program

2025

2026 – YTD 7/20/2026

Percent discount offered	Number offered this amount	Number that joined using the code	Number not used	total \$\$ amount discounted	Percent discount offered	Number offered this amount	Number that joined using the code	Number not used	total \$\$ amount discounted
75	23	12	11	628.95	75	12	5	7	239.9
100	4	4	0	430	100	11	10	1	750
Total	27	16	11	1058.95	Total	23	15	11	989.9

This is a very successful program this year, perhaps due to changes that were made in the scoring protocol and making only two categories (100% coverage of fee and/or 75% coverage of membership fee.)

We are mid-year and applications are about the same at this point as they were for the whole year of 2025. In August – September, we get the bulk of our applications (i.e., the beginning of the school year.) We got more than half the applications last year after August.

Almost everyone used the 100% code whereas less than half used the 75% code when offered it.

On the new website this will be highlighted better (i.e., how to get help). Currently it is on the website but we also get a lot of people who simply email us and ask.

ASPB Website Updates

ASPB Website updates are in progress. The staff has been working hard on this. Will be coming soon and it looks beautiful and we are working hard to make it more intuitive and easier, more functional.

To address some of the issues spoken of previously, we are creatively adding more heft to the website to show that we are an international society and not just a U.S. organization. We plan to make it clear that plant biologists from everywhere in the world are free to join ASPB

Aruna wanted to know if ASPB is getting feedback from the various Committees on the website updates. Crispin said that the staff will begin with their best efforts and then we can have a review period for key stakeholders that is meaningful but short so as not to slow down the momentum.

Tessa then asked about an ASPB app saying that it might attract younger people to become members if they could just pay using their phones with ApplePay or Venmo. It was noted, however, that while the process we have right now is cumbersome, that is partially dictated by the CRM we have. ASPB's IT team is actively investigating the next CRM for ASPB that will make it easier for someone to join and/or become a section member – and also how to become part of a Committee. It is recognized that this process is not very intuitive for first time members.

ASPB Staff

Aruna suggested that ASPB needs to get better at launching initiatives by Committees and sections in a timelier matter rather than creating delays. The newsletter was mentioned as an example because it is discouraging when something has been prepared for a newsletter that is supposed to be published in October, for example, but doesn't end up coming out until February. It was noted that ASPB is aware of the problem and is working on becoming timelier and Crispin acknowledged he needs to address this from a managerial perspective but that there is not enough staff to provide backup for each other.

The Ambassadors are waiting on materials from ASPB on training and have requested a one-page document that they can use at their institutions that gives a broad picture of ASPB membership benefits and includes a QR code (link to sign-up).

Someone suggested that joining ASPB should have an automatic renewal component with automatic being the passive action and a click of a button would be needed to opt-out. It was noted that Clara Woodall, ASPB's CFO, has disagreed about this in the past and has some reasoning for this but that discussion was tabled for another time.

Last Minute Thoughts/Comments

Today's agenda was not completed so we will do so in a follow up meeting.

ASPB is actively matching up legacy and ambassador members at the same institution and providing them with recruitment materials initially targeting some particular institutions who we feel would bring more members. This initiative is in the process of being rolled out now.

The Membership Workshop at Plant Biology was very successful. The space was small/tight and was set for 90 but we exceeded that. We will plan to do it again next year after meeting with the table chairs to get some feedback.

The next Membership Committee meeting will be in October.

THANK YOU!

Tessa Burch-Smith ended the meeting with a thank you to a “very important committee” that keeps the organization going. Efforts are very much recognized and appreciated.