Membership Committee Section Reps Meeting

October 30, 2026

Attendees: Courtney Leisner, Frank Krause, Shoshana Kronfeld, Michael V Mickelbart, Miguel Pineros, Aruna Kilaru, Linda Palmer, Laura Malaguerra, Colleen Doherty, Marco Burger, Azam Noori

Quick recap

The Membership Committee meeting focused on discussing potential restructuring of ASPB's geographical sections and exploring ways to better support regional committees. Aruna Kilaru, chair of the Membership Committee, led the discussion with Shoshana Kronfeld presenting proposed new section boundaries that would better balance membership distribution and geographic coverage across regions including the United States and internationally. The group discussed whether to split large sections like the Southern Section into smaller, more manageable regions to improve member participation and meeting accessibility, with concerns raised about maintaining successful existing meetings and the logistical challenges of hosting events across large geographic areas. Frank, as interim CEO, emphasized that these discussions were part of a broader "regeneration" process for ASPB and stressed that any changes would be developed through information gathering and multi-year planning rather than immediate implementation. The meeting also addressed the need for better support from ASPB national office for section meetings, including assistance with registration systems, event management, and logistics, though some section representatives expressed concerns about external support potentially being disruptive to their current operations. The meeting ended with a note to call for continued deliberations on how ASPB can streamline its role and activities with regional sections and vice versa.

Full Summary

Membership Committee Geographical Restructuring

The Membership Committee meeting began with introductions, including welcoming Frank as a new participant. Aruna outlined three main discussion points: rethinking geographical separations and restructuring based on member locations, standardizing ASPB-guided structures for regional meetings, and discussing the utilization of ambassadors in membership roles. The meeting was in its early stages, with Shoshana preparing to present slides on geographical restructuring, though the full discussion had not yet commenced.

ASPB Regional Sections Restructuring

The meeting focused on discussing potential changes to ASPB's regional sections to address logistical challenges and ensure better representation across different geographic areas and membership sizes. Aruna and Shoshana Kronfeld highlighted issues with the current structure, particularly in large sections like the Southern Section, which spans from Texas to North Carolina and makes it difficult for members in different regions to attend meetings. Frank emphasized that these discussions are part of a broader "regeneration" plan for ASPB to better meet the needs of plant biologists globally and advance the strategic plan approved by the board of directors. The group explored potential reorganization options, including dividing large sections like the Southern and Western sections, expanding international chapters, and creating regional sections in Europe, Asia, and Africa, though nothing was finalized.

Laura sought feedback on the pros and cons of creating smaller regional sections to better connect plant scientists locally. Marco questioned the data presented in slides showing national versus section membership numbers, while Frank requested information about how many members would need to change sections under different proposals and asked about potential geographic or scientific specializations within regions. Colleen expressed concerns about the effort required for additional leadership positions and questioned the need for splitting existing sections, particularly for domestic regions where members already face similar travel distances.

The discussion focused on regional meeting locations, particularly the Mid-Atlantic section meeting held at the University of Maryland. Courtney explained that there is strong resistance to moving the meeting from its current location due to historical ties and established infrastructure at the University of Maryland, with faculty and officers still actively involved in organizing the event. Courtney indicated she would not advocate for moving the meeting unless there was strong consensus among section members, noting that while Virginia Tech had been proposed as a potential host, there was concern about maintaining the high scientific standards established at the current location.

Azam expressed support for reevaluating section boundaries, particularly in the Northeast, which currently includes nine states, and suggested including Canada in the Northeast section could be beneficial. Laura pointed out that some existing sections already include Canadian territories, and Michael highlighted both benefits and challenges of splitting large sections, including logistical issues with meeting locations and hosting responsibilities.

ASPB Regional Sections Role Clarification

The discussion focused on clarifying the roles and goals of different regional sections within ASPB. Miguel confirmed that their section aims to maintain smaller meetings

focused on undergraduates, graduate students, and postdocs rather than expanding to larger universities. Courtney explained that the Mid-Atlantic section's primary function is organizing meetings with mostly undergraduates and graduates, along with some high school students. Aruna clarified that while regional sections maintain their independence to host meetings, there is also an emerging focus on how these sections can support ASPB's national agenda beyond just organizing meetings.

PUI Section

Aruna and Azam discussed the potential for PUI sections to be more involved and work closer with regional meetings, noting a lack of connection between regional meetings and PUI in the past.

ASPB Section Meeting Support Discussion

The discussion focused on ASPB's potential support for section meetings, with Laura proposing to help with logistics management including event resources, templates, and contract management to reduce burden on meeting organizers. Laura provided an example of issues at a recent meeting where food shortages and long lines occurred, and mentioned a past situation involving an unexpected $11,000 hotel bill due to contract fine print.

Colleen expressed concerns about ASPB's proposed support for section meetings, arguing that third-party involvement would be disruptive to their current successful model. She specifically mentioned issues with previous ASPB registration systems and preferred keeping meetings cost-effective and locally coordinated. Marco noted that the western section had a positive experience co-organizing with ASPB and Bay Area Plant Hub, while suggesting that identifying national members who aren't section members could help increase section membership.

Member Participation and Retention Strategies

Aruna discussed the need to increase member participation in national activities beyond just students, particularly highlighting faculty members who participate in regional sections but not national committees. Azam suggested that declining membership across societies might be due to financial constraints and time limitations, while Shoshana Kronfeld noted that members often join around meeting times but let memberships lapse in between. The group discussed strategies to improve member value and retention, with Azam mentioning that ASPB is exploring ways to enhance benefits and potentially move some services behind a paid wall.

ASPB Involvement with other local events

The group discussed the membership structure and fees, with Marco suggesting they maintain the Bay Area Plant Hub annual meeting while considering a smaller second meeting elsewhere, potentially in Vancouver. Laura and Frank agreed to have a separate conversation about ASPB's involvement in other plant science meetings beyond their organized events. Azam expressed support for national society support of regional activities, particularly for webinars, noting the benefits of broader reach through national platforms. Aruna clarified that the goal was not to disrupt functioning regional meetings but to explore ways to improve ASPB's value overall through better geographic reach and section committee involvement.

The meeting ended with a note to call for continued deliberations on how ASPB can streamline its role and activities with regional sections and vice versa.