

## AIR 2023-2024 BOARD REPORT

### Introduction

Governance Process GP-XIV, Board Self-Monitoring, requires the AIR board of directors to monitor its performance for excellence in governance.

The policy requires the outgoing President to submit an annual report of engaged work activities to the incoming Vice President/President Elect. Report submission occurs prior to commencement of the annual business meeting. Required transition report ensures knowledge continuity in board leadership, operations, and governance. Knowledge continuity as required by GP-XIII addresses the following five report categories:

- Accomplishments
- Cost of Governance
- Membership Voice Responsiveness
- Board and Executive Director Relationship
- Adherence to Governance Style

To that end, the following report highlights board member activities conducted during the 2023-2024, and as such, complies with the requirements noted in GP-XIV.

### Accomplishments

Each new Board has the honor and opportunity to build on the accomplishments of previous Boards and BOD Presidents. In keeping with that, the 2023-24 Board continued to develop:

- **Continued IR future committee and established a new standing committee based on the work.** Beginning in the 2022-2023 Board year, the IR Future Committee was launched to reposition the board to better look ahead to the opportunities and challenges shaping the field and the association. The work resulted in a series of core pillars meant to help guide the strategic work of the BOD. Led by Laura Palucki Blake and a membership composed of BOD, NEC, and AIR community members, the ad hoc committee continued its work in the 2023-2024 Board year, culminating in the recommendation that the BOD convert the committee into a standing one, and the development of a toolkit intended to codify looking towards the future. This resulted in the creation of the standing committee on the Future of IR, and the discontinuation of the ad hoc committee.
- **Recalibrated the policy governance training as a part of the Governance, Orientation, and Training Committee.** Evaluations of recent governance and Board orientations revealed a desire among BOD and NEC members to revise the in-person trainings offered leading up to the AIR Forum. As such, the Governance, Orientation, and Training Committee partnered with Govern for Impact, adopting a modularized course intended to provide more hands-on experience on matters related to Policy Governance. Led by current Board Chair Brent Drake, the committee also successfully revised the in-person

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training to focus on unpacking what it means to be a Board member for an organization that has adopted Policy Governance, with an emphasis on identifying ends versus means, effective communication with the Chief Executive Officer, effective review of monitoring reports, and the appropriate use of data to inform the strategic decision making undertaken by the BOD. Evaluations indicate that the revised training was well-received by BOD and NEC members, and future sessions will build on the progress made during Board year 2023-2024.

- **Established an ad hoc committee focused on reviewing the pathways to leadership opportunities.** During the 2023-2024 Board year the Board concluded a successful multi-year engagement campaign with members of the AIR community. Conversations with past-presidents, coupled with learnings that surfaced from a series of in-person and virtual listening sessions highlighted a hunger among community members to have their voices heard. Moreover, members expressed a desire for future iterations of the Board to reflect the breadth, depth, and diversity of leadership throughout the field. Christopher Peña, the BOD secretary led the creation of the Ad Hoc Committee on Volunteer Leadership Pathways, which was composed of members of the BOD and NEC and AIR community, which generated a series of recommendations designed to lower barriers to participation in BOD and NEC leadership, memorialize the approach taken by the NEC during the 2023-2024 election cycle, and provide further support to would-be AIR leaders. Examples of these changes included the launch of a pilot Forum sponsorship program, the recommendation to consider developing a more robust mentorship program, and a more streamlined nominations process—the details of which were outlined in multiple Board Corners by Paige Borden, the 2023-2024 Chair of the NEC, and Karen Webber, the 2023-2024 Immediate Past President and Liaison to the NEC.
- **In partnership with the Nominations and Elections Committee completed a successful elections cycle.** The 2023-24 NEC deployed the leadership and succession amendments to the AIR Constitution and Bylaws passed by AIR members in February 2023. The internally elected Chair and Board Liaison structure helped to provide greater continuity for NEC leadership and maintained the critical link to the Board of Directors. 2023-24 NEC activities included 17 new initiatives to recruit the strongest pool of nominees and submit an expert-level slate for the membership voting consideration. Activities included streamlining the nominations questionnaire, conducting additional outreach activities, and enhancing the candidate evaluations. The committee also assessed their process and generated recommendations for continued improvements in the 2024-25 cycle.
- **Developed an ad hoc committee that reviewed the qualifications needed to serve as a member of the BOD.** As a follow-up to the successful 2023-2024 Board Cycle, and led by Brent Drake, 2023-2024 Vice President of the BOD, and Paige Borden the chair of the NEC, the ad hoc committee reviewed Governance Policy XIII, which articulated the eligibility qualifications and expectations of BOD and NEC members. The work continued during the early part of the 2024-2025 Board Year, resulting in the creation of revised eligibility qualifications and expectations of BOD and NEC members.

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- **Supported the successful launch and pilot of the organizational membership option.** A multiyear effort by Boards of Directors and the Executive Office led to the pilot and launch of the AIR organizational membership option in Board year 2023-2024. The first year focus for the organizational membership outreach was to generate interest among IR/IE professionals and was a resounding success. Six months after the January 2024 launched, AIR welcomed 300 new organizational members to the community
- **Inaugurated the AIR Rising Star Award and launched a new recognition ceremony.** An Awards Review working group, led by Mitch Nessler, the 2022-2024 Board Parliamentarian, created the Rising Star Award to recognize institutional research (IR) professionals who are early in their careers and are emerging leaders. Linli Zhou of Lasell University graciously accepted the award. Additionally, in partnership with the Executive Office, the BOD launched a new awards recognition ceremony at the annual Forum to better honor AIR award recipients. The initial ceremony was well received by attendees. In addition to Dr. Zhou, Julie Carpenter-Hubin accepted the John Stecklein Distinguished Member Award, and Michelle Siebert Appel received the Outstanding Service Award.

These achievements reflect the leadership of BOD, NEC, and AIR community members, and demonstrate the commitment of our community to AIR's mission, vision, and values.

### Cost of Governance

Funding allotment for board operational expenses was \$130,000. Board operational expenses as noted in GP-XIII includes but not limited to training, audit reviews, membership engagement initiatives, and meeting costs.

Through fiscal prudence and because of the number of video-based meetings, actual board expenses for 2023-2024 were less than the identified allotment. Total spent (through May 2024) was approximately \$54,000. In addition to quarterly reporting, the treasurer provided regular updates on fiscal operations that required board awareness.

Although the total amount was not spent in 2023-2024, I recommend keeping the allotment at \$130,000 to ensure that additional training for policy governance, in-person BOD meetings, or financial support to attend Forum can occur if needed.

### Responsiveness to Membership Voice

As noted in the 2022-2023 Board year self-monitoring report, the BOD has endeavored over the course of multiple years to listen to AIR community members. The 2023-2024 Board year built on a multi-year engagement composed of listening sessions at affiliate organization meetings, with an emphasis on communicating with members at an individual level, and at scale.

- The President had one-on-one conversations with many past presidents to help create a deeper understanding of the build across successive Board cycles, develop continuity across multiple Board years, and to enlist past AIR leaders in helping to shape the future direction of the BOD.

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- Board members held, “Office Hours” at the AIR table during the 2024 Forum, with an emphasis on engaging members with respect to the nominations and elections process, upcoming opportunities for leadership and capacity development, and to build community. The Board also hosted a “Board Coffee Chat” in March 2024 as an open opportunity for members to interact with Board members.
- For the first time, the Board conducted a “replay” of the 2023-24 Annual Business Meeting on June 18. The replay of the business meeting was open to the entire AIR community as an option for those unable to attend the official meeting during the AIR Forum. The recording of the business meeting replay is currently available on the AIR website.
- Additionally, brief meetings were held between the President and each vendor during Forum to welcome AIR partners and express gratitude for their support.
- The findings of the Ad Hoc IR Future Committee were presented, and members were facilitated through an exercise designed to help the AIR community better assess the emerging opportunities and challenges shaping the field.
- A pilot initiative designed to engage those with recently expired memberships was undertaken in partnership with the Executive Office. Despite efforts by Board members, the program did not achieve desired results, suggesting that alternative approaches to member reengagement may be required to incentivize membership renewal.
- Multiple “Board Corners” were authored the quarterly eAIR that communicated the BOD’s initiatives and activities, with context to help members understand the strategic approach adopted by the BOD.
- Conversations that began in Board year 2022-2023 regarding the inclusion of a diverse body of members in AIR volunteer and leadership activities continued in Board year 2023-2024. These conversations led to several sessions at the 2023 AIR Forum, and informed the creation of multiple Ad Hoc Committees, as well as the focus on Standing Committees.

Looking ahead, there will be new opportunities to engage a diverse cross-section of a growing array of IR/IE adjacent members considering the organizational membership pilot and given that colleges and universities across the nation and globe increasingly focus on data-informed decision making.

The Board would make good use of its time by focusing on a comprehensive outreach and engagement strategy that engendered a sense of community across these emerging membership segments and must do so in a way that preserves the best of what AIR has historically offered to IR/IE professionals. While that is no easy task, it represents a monumental opportunity for growth and impact.

Like other associations, AIR is also faced with optimizing resource allocation and aligning it with areas of promise and impact. For example, while listening sessions with Affiliate Organizations generate insights and a deeper sense of community, they also come at a cost, and participation

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and engagement in those meetings can be sparse or uneven at best. Moving forward, and in partnership with the BOD, these kinds of engagements should be evaluated for efficacy, as a very limited number of members and affiliates participate. This could have unintended consequences, such as biased qualitative data generated from a small handful of vocal or influential members/affiliates, and the suboptimal use of resources at a time when financial constraints are felt by the Association and community members, alike.

### **Board and Executive Director Relationship**

Activities undertaken during 2023-2024 BOD year has affirmed that the relationship between the CEO and BOD is collegial, constructive, positive, and strong. CEO Keller navigates her role and relationship with the BOD with kindness and effectiveness, juggling the myriad perspectives of individual BOD members while maintaining appropriate boundaries between those changed with governance and strategy and those who are responsible for the successful development implementation of the means that bring that strategy to life.

Such a balance can be a difficult one to attain and maintain within the context of Policy Governance, as the complementary perspectives of BOD members can sometimes—and with good intent—blur the lines between ends and means. As such, effective communication between the CEO and BOD was a key element of the revised training that took place before and during Forum. As the Board year progressed, BOD members grew more comfortable articulating their views in a way that was in keeping with the spirit of policy governance and aligned with the clearly defined roles and relationships between the CEO and the BOD. Looking ahead, continuing to reaffirm and practice this, with an emphasis on one voice, will serve to further bolster the effectiveness of the relationship that exists between the CEO and the BOD.

Another important element of the relationship between the CEO and BOD is the composition and granularity of monitoring reports, which provide clarity about what success looks like, and offer a window into the day-to-day operation of the Association led by the CEO. At times, enthusiasm for additional data of greater granularity was expressed by Board members, which reflects their dedication to the success and health of the Association. However, it is crucial to be aware of the limitations of such data, particularly when compared from year-to-year, given the variation in programs and services offered by AIR. Future Boards should keep in mind such limitations and weigh them with the additional lift needed to provide deeper views, and endeavor to maintain an appropriate altitude to not wade into the means of running the Association.

The Policy Governance framework was adopted over a decade ago and implemented over the course of multiple years. As such, and as recommended by 2022-2023 President Webber, a comprehensive review of the organization's policy statements would be beneficial to ensure that the policies that govern the association are continuously modernized and aligned with the evolving nature of AIR. While largely well aligned, areas of misalignment have likely surfaced, and they should be addressed.

### **Adherence to Governance Style**

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One important element of Policy Governance is to ensure that time during BOD meetings is spent on critical matters, urgent developments, and organizational strategy. To facilitate this, BOD members are given monitoring reports roughly a week in advance and provided a digital document to ask clarifying questions to avoid misuse of time.

The BOD experimented with the tools provided within Robert's Rules of Order to optimize its use of time. The introduction of consent agendas, restructuring of meetings, and deeper emphasis on matters related to member engagement and strategy development resulted in efficient and effective meetings that helped focus the Board on its governance role. Leveraging Robert's Rules of Order as a tool to facilitate effective meetings, rather than as organizational doctrine, helped members of the Board feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions while maintaining adherence to the Policy Governance framework. Doing so when relations between the BOD and the CEO are productive and strong is a vital component of building a resilient and fruitful governance body, and far more difficult to do during highly volatile times. As such, future Boards should continuously reinforce the importance of Robert's Rules and Policy Governance. This will help a positive culture of governance continue to take root and grow.

### **Conclusion**

Strong leadership from the BOD, NEC, and CEO have positioned AIR to thrive, which is no small feat considering the tenuous position that macro and micro social, political, and economic trends have foisted upon the broader postsecondary community. Positive trends in membership, engagement, and finances suggest that AIR has strengthened itself despite the many challenges it has faced both during and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. New opportunities to amplify its scale, accelerate its impact, and strengthen an increasingly diverse community should engender a sense of confidence in the future of the Association. The BOD has a significant role to play in helping AIR realize its full potential and can only do so by honoring the voice of its members, effectively collaborating with the Executive Office and the CEO, and adhering to the governance framework endorsed by the community. I am eager to see AIR continue to flourish and thank all of you for your partnership.