

17 May 2022

To: The Music Library Association (MLA) Board

From: The members of the Committee Recruitment Task Force (Erin Conor, chair; Mallory Sajewski, Zachary Tumlin, Jessica Abbazio, Kristin Wolski, Mary L. Huisman, and Kristie Nelsen)

Subject: Committee Recruitment Task Force Recommendation

The Committee Recruitment Task Force was charged in Spring 2021 with “developing processes for how members of MLA Committees are recruited and selected.” Below is our proposed revision to current practices, including an outline for a new process for committee membership selection and appointment, as well as general recommendations.

To successfully execute our charge, we determined that it was necessary to 1) solicit feedback broadly from the MLA community regarding the strengths and weaknesses of current committee recruitment and selection processes and 2) compare MLA’s current practices in this area with those of peer professional organizations. To gather this information, we developed and distributed three surveys: 1) for the general MLA community regarding committee participation; 2) for current committee, task force, and chapter chairs; and 3) for leadership in peer professional organizations. Additionally, we shared our general survey with the Music Library Students and Emerging Professionals Interest Group (MLStEP), the Paraprofessional Interest Group, the Public Libraries Committee, and all 10 MLA chapters. We also had follow-up conversations with two survey respondents who indicated that they would like to have such conversations in their response, examined committee appointment information on selected peer organization websites, and had a conversation with Career Development & Services Committee chairs and Get Involved organizers regarding MLA’s “Get Involved” event.

Recruitment and selection

The Board will appoint an “Appointments Committee,” who will have overall responsibility for all committee appointments.

Membership on this Committee will be open to all who are eligible for service on MLA committees. The Board will recruit for the Committee following a process similar to what is outlined below for all committee appointments. The membership of the Committee should be diverse in all ways, including members from underrepresented groups,

different career stages (e.g., student, early career), different career tracks (e.g., academic, public libraries, library workers not currently in the role of “librarian”), and different geographic regions. Appointments to the Appointments Committee are for one year. One current Appointments Committee member, as identified by the President, should serve an additional one-year term in order to act as chair.

Working with current committee chairs, the Committee will:

- Identify upcoming committee vacancies, including chair vacancies.
- Advertise and recruit for vacancies.
- Develop a recommended slate of candidates to fill vacancies, to be delivered to the President for final approval and appointment.

The Committee will develop and implement a common application for committee membership. This application will be a simple online form on the MLA website that can be completed at any time. This application will include a question allowing applicants to voluntarily self-identify as a member of an underrepresented group(s); the application should state that this information would be used only for the purposes of recruitment for MLA service opportunities.

The Committee will also develop criteria for making committee appointment decisions. This criteria should take into account factors that contribute to committee diversity.

As part of the recruitment process, the Committee will share the following information with the public:

- Who is eligible to serve on MLA committees, including students, who may be unaware or hesitant due to lack of information.
- How committee appointment decisions are made.
- That MLA strives to ensure diverse representation within its committees.
- Which committees have vacancies and what service would entail (e.g., committee charge, current projects, member expectations and time commitment).

Committee recruitment information will be shared through a variety of channels, including the MLA listserv (MLA-L), website, social media accounts, Your Membership, etc.

A record of previous service (in MLA or elsewhere) is not a prerequisite for committee appointment, and the Committee will strive to balance committee membership so that everyone who wants to has opportunities to serve during their time in MLA. Care should be taken that certain people not be over-approached (e.g., the same public library members are asked over and over for committee membership).

In-person attendance at MLA Annual Meetings will not be a factor in appointment decisions.

The membership of the Committee will include one Board member in an ex-officio/liaison role.

Task Forces, special officers, and Board members

The application process outlined above will generate a pool of individuals interested in greater involvement with MLA. The Board and the Nominating Committee should work with the Appointments Committee and use this pool as a resource when identifying candidates for service opportunities.

Recruitment and selection of chairs

Recruitment and appointment of committee chairs will be determined by the Appointments Committee in collaboration with current committee chairs and the Board. These two groups will determine whether current committee membership is a necessary prerequisite to become chair of said committee.

When current committee membership **is not** a prerequisite, the Committee will recruit following the process outlined above, including reaching out directly to members of underrepresented groups (who self-identified through the common form) and inviting them to apply for chair.

When current committee membership **is** a prerequisite, the Committee will work with current chairs to identify new chairs. Factors that contribute to committee diversity will be taken into account.

Recruitment and appointments timeline

From our surveys and conversations with members, we learned that the lack of continuity within committees, especially for committee chairs, is sometimes challenging. Recruitment and appointment of committee members and chairs currently occurs around the Annual Meeting, with terms of service ending after it. This timeline means that there is typically no overlap between new and departing members and chairs. To address this problem, some committees have instituted a vice-chair and/or immediate past-chair role.

We recommend a consistent appointment timeline across all committees. Our timeline builds in overlap between new and departing members and chairs:

- Terms of service will continue to begin and end immediately following the Annual Meeting.
- In the Spring following the Annual Meeting, the Appointments Committee will begin recruitment (for positions to begin after the next year's Annual Meeting).
- The Committee will send its appointment recommendations to the President in the Fall.
- Appointments will be approved by the President and communicated to all parties by the start of the new year.
- Both incoming and outgoing committee members will be invited to attend their committee's business meeting during the Annual Meeting to foster information exchange.

This is a general timeline. For each appointment cycle, the Committee and the Board will develop a specific timeline with dates. This timeline will then be shared with the MLA community as part of the recruitment process.

“Get Involved” Session

Most of our survey respondents indicated they had not found their way to service through “Get Involved.” As currently structured, “Get Involved” may no longer be the most effective way to introduce members to service opportunities. We recommend separating MLA’s “Get Involved” event from the Annual Meeting. “Get Involved” should be virtual (synchronous and/or asynchronous), and it should be scheduled to coincide with the Spring recruitments timeline outlined above. The “Committees Officer” (see “Additional findings” below) should work with Career Development & Services to further fine-tune “Get Involved.” The 2022 “Get Involved” coordinators produced [a report](#), and this document may be a good place to start.

Additional recommendations

Membership in MLA should not be required to apply for service. Everyone associated with MLA, whether they be an active member or not, should be encouraged to apply. However, those appointed to serve should be required to maintain an active membership. This is in line with practices at other organizations.

The Appointments Committee should work with the Diversity Scholarship Committee, the Freeman Travel Grant Committee, and the Paraprofessional/Public Librarian Travel

Grant Committee to invite recipients to apply for service, and those who are appointed should be compensated for their time. A stipend, reduced registration, and/or reduced membership dues are possible options, and compensation should be beyond that already tied to the award received. This would help MLA work towards two of its goals: 1) more diverse committee composition and 2) increased opportunities for members of underrepresented groups to attain leadership positions.

These recommendations represent a significant shift in the way that MLA carries out its activities and the Board must carefully consider the most effective ways to introduce this new approach; it will be important to get buy-in from current committee chairs and the membership at large.

Finally, any changes implemented as a result of these recommendations should be assessed and modified as needed. We recommend an assessment after three years but leave determination of the exact timeline to the Board.

Additional findings

MLA should designate a person (or group) to coordinate the work of committees across the Association. This “Committees Officer” ex-officio/liason should partner with others in MLA to:

- Formalize an onboarding process for new chairs (the recently created [quick-start guide](#) is a good start) **and** committee members.
- Develop a mechanism to ensure continued onboarding going forward.
- Develop a way for chairs to learn about related work happening in other committees.
- Connect with new members, first-time attendees, early-career members, and others to encourage continued engagement with our organization.

Another recurring theme is the need to review MLA’s committee structure (also raised in the new Strategic Plan). The Administrative Handbook (II.B.5c) already contains relevant language: “The Board of Directors shall authorize the dissolution of a committee when, in the opinion of the Board of Directors, its usefulness has ceased. This decision and reasons for the dissolution shall be reported to the membership.”

Dissolving a committee is a difficult and potentially unpopular decision. In addition to any large-scale review of committees that may occur as a result of the Strategic Plan, MLA needs a process for committee review that is more structured than what is currently outlined in the Administrative Handbook. This “Committees Officer” could play

a role in ongoing assessment, for example, by reviewing annual reports and flagging inactive committees for the Board.