



ASSOCIATION FOR  
PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS  
& MANAGEMENT

## **Strategic Plan**

**APPAM Committee on Institutional Representatives**

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**Strategic Planning Subcommittee:**

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## I. Executive Summary

This report provides options for enhancing the role of the APPAM Committee of Institutional Representatives (IRC), and for repositioning its support of the Spring Conference. The APPAM bylaws provide the IRC with two general roles: (1) to communicate between the institutional membership and the Policy Council and (2) to provide “a means by which the institutional members may contribute to the association’s mission.” The by-laws establish a leadership structure for IRC, require that the IRC meets twice each year, and designate seats on the Policy Council for the IRC (the Chair and four elected positions). In recent years, the primary activity of the IRC has been to support organization of the annual Spring conference. At the same time, the IRC plays an important source of financial support as well as a “training ground” for leadership in the Policy Council. Hence it would seem valuable to enhance its linkages to the Policy Council and find opportunities to engage members in substantive activities of strategic interest.

This document suggests several options for focusing the role of the IRC in supporting APPAM, for discussion of the Policy Council and the IRC at the Spring meetings:

*Biennial Conference Schedule.* Considering that the Spring conference is operating in a crowded Spring conference environment, the IRC and APPAM might consider moving it to a biennial schedule. This would reduce the administrative costs of the conference and provide the IRC Chair more time to organize a relevant and impactful conference, while continuing to promote it as a venue for focused exploration of critical policy themes.

*IRC Committee.* With four members and a chair on the Policy Council, it is suggested that the IRC chair and the four IRC representatives serve as a formal committee of the IRC. This improve strategic focus of the IRC and to serve as a formal channel for communication with the IRC membership.

*IRC Member on Finance Committee.* At times, concerns have been raised that while IRC members pay higher dues they do not play a direct role in oversight of the budget. This concern was addressed in the revision of the governance structure that added IRC members to the Policy Council, as the entire Policy Council, including IRC members, approve the budget and act in an oversight capacity. The role could be further enhanced in practice by appointing one of the IRC designates to the APPAM Finance Committee.

*Develop IRC Communications Supports.* To promote communication among the IRC and the Policy Council, APPAM should support improved dedicated communications among IRC members. The APPAM staff has already taken steps to improve communications by creating an IRC List-Serve. The IRC might explore additional means of improving communications, as through a blog or other electronic forum. While the list serve is an invaluable means of improving communications within IRC, a blog or e-forum would provide an opportunity for the IRC to promote the APPAM mission among its membership and externally, and to link members of academic, applied research, and policy institutions.

*Role in Student Professional Development.* As it is composed of institutions that train and hire policy analysts and researchers, the IRC would seem to have an important role to play in supporting the student conference as well as related professional development activities. It is suggested that IRC take on the task of developing and staffing professional development sessions at the various APPAM

conference activities, in partnership with the student advisory council. Furthermore, the IRC could support the Student Conferences by playing a role in reviewing and selecting conference sessions, in partnership with the Student Activities Council (SAC).

*Committees on IRC:* The APPAM Policy Council became much more effective following the adoption of standing committees charged with implementation of the strategic plan. It is recommended that the IRC establish several subcommittees, to be appointed by the IRC Chair in consultation with the IRC representatives on Policy Council. The document discusses options for these subcommittees, the goal of which is to provide an institutionalized structure for getting work done in the IRC on a continuing basis.

## **II. Issue Overview and Approach**

At the Spring 2016 meeting of the Committee of Institutional Representatives (IRC), some attendees expressed concerns about the direction of the IRC within APPAM. During a discussion of the focus of the next Spring conference, attendees questioned the singular focus of the IRC on the conference, and expressed concern that it did not fulfill its role as a deliberative forum within APPAM. The attendees voted to suspend the Spring Conference for one year, and the Chair agreed to work with a committee of members to consider (1) the role of the Spring conference and (2) the strategic role of the IRC within APPAM. The IRC Chair asked for volunteers to a strategic subcommittee, and recruited others to ensure that it included a broad array of interests. The subcommittee met to identify issues and discuss the general strategic roles that the IRC has played within APPAM. At the Fall meeting, the subcommittee members moderated break-out groups in the IRC meetings to discuss the strategic roles of the IRC. Summary notes from the break-out groups were circulated to the Institutional Representatives and informed development of this Plan.

The draft Strategic Plan was circulated to Policy Council and IRC members. At the 2017 Spring Governance meetings, the options laid out in the plan were discussed in Executive Committee, Policy Council, and in the IRC. Several recommendations for modifications to the Plan emerged from these meetings and were included in the final plan, which will be circulated to the IRC for a vote of the full membership.

## **III. Role of the Spring Conference**

The Spring Conference has been a regular APPAM activity for 30 years, during which time there have been 25 conferences (in some years, the Spring meetings have focused on strategic planning activities). Although it is sometimes suggested that the role of the Spring conference is to focus on teaching, this is somewhat of a misconception as only five conferences have had a singular focus on curriculum. Many have been cross-cutting, connecting pedagogy and practice issues to other themes such as the millennium, globalization, or justice. There has also been a strong focus on practical relevance and diversity. From an organizational standpoint, the spring conference recently has been the charge of the Chair of the Institutional Representatives, who has selected the theme for the conference, and who has organized the one-day event in partnership with APPAM staff.

*Value of the Spring Conference.* Several benefits of the Spring conference have been advanced by the membership:

- Most importantly, it supports a focused exploration of strategic issues that otherwise tend to get lost in the annual research conference. Thus, it allows members to engage in discussion about how to improve pedagogy, diversify the field, and sharpen policy relevance, all foci that are central to APPAM's strategic plan.
- The conference provides an activity associated with the institutional membership and Policy Council meetings, lending structure to the Spring meetings and providing opportunities for networking and deliberation regarding issues of interest to members.
- From a pragmatic standpoint, some have suggested that institutions will not reimburse travel to DC for meetings unless it is associated with participation in a conference.

*Costs and Challenges.* While in recent years the conference has been well attended, it does pose several challenges as APPAM's portfolio continues to grow:

- APPAM staff members now coordinate two-to-three additional conferences in the same general time frame, including the regional student conferences (two this year); and the international conference which formerly was managed more independently of APPAM.
- With the reinvigorated APPAM international conference and PMRA holding an annual conference during the summer, the APPAM spring conference is operating in a crowded public affairs conference environment.
- To organize two conferences during a two-year term is considerable work for the Institutional Representatives Chair, who does not have in place a committee structure to assist with conference organization, and has had to recruit an ad hoc committee each year.
- The Spring conference is the only conference activity held by APPAM that has not in recent years covered costs and has required a modest subsidy from APPAM. In the past three years, the subsidy for the conference was \$21,593 (2016), \$9,064 (2015) and \$22,039 (2014). This subsidy represents approximately 1% percent of the APPAM annual budget. Note that this subsidy does not include the costs of administrative staff time directed to conference coordination, which is arguably the larger issue considering the impacted conference schedule in the Spring.

*Biennial Conference Schedule.* Because the Spring Conference does provide regular, focused attention to issues of strategic importance, it would seem imprudent to drop it altogether. Rather, it is suggested that APPAM reduce costs and facilitate conference development by moving it to a biennial schedule. Doing so will provide the Chair greater opportunity to focus on other strategic activities, and will lighten the workload for staff and halve the financial subsidy. It would likely make sense to hold the Spring Conference during the year in which the Fall conference is held outside DC, so that there is an opportunity to have a DC based conference annually. (This is not to imply that the conference need always be held in DC). During the year in which the Spring Conference is not held, the Chair of Institutional Representatives could focus on other strategic activities of interest to the

institutional membership. Note that the Policy Council has endorsed moving the Spring Conference to a semi-annual schedule.

#### **IV. Options for Enhancing Role of Committee of Institutional Representatives**

The APPAM by-laws state that the role of the Committee of Institutional Representatives (IRC) is to serve “as a body to share information among the institutional members of APPAM, communicate their concerns and interests to other leadership in APPAM, and as a means by which the institutional members may contribute to the association’s mission.” Thus, the role has two general foci: (1) to act in essence as a mediating body that connects the institutional members more formally to the Policy Council and (2) to contribute substantively to the mission of APPAM. The first of these is essentially a governance role while the second involves more substantive action, and has historically been accomplished through the Spring Conference. Each of these issues is addressed below.

*Governance Issues.* There appear to be mixed views regarding the extent to which there is a need for reform of the IRC from a governance standpoint. In the focus group at the Fall conference, some expressed that the IRC was represented well in governance by the chair and designated representatives on Policy Councils, while others voiced concerns about the “thin” governance role of the IRC. To the extent that there were concerns, they appeared to focus around a lack of opportunity to deliberate and advise on issues under consideration by APPAM. For example, specific concerns mentioned included:

- The IRC meeting tends to be short, and in the Fall, follows the other governance meetings. Meetings tend to focus on reports rather than deliberating and providing advice on issues under consideration;
- Although the institutional members have designated seats on the Policy Council, it is unclear how this has enhanced information flow or improved the voice of institutional members;
- There is not formalized agreement on the strategic role of the IRC, so that its focus shifts with the chair;
- The IRC and its meetings are too large to get business done. There is a need for a committee structure to support its functions.
- Some have suggested that the IRC does not have formalized budgetary input despite that members pay substantially larger dues than individual members (not mentioned in focus group but has come up regularly in previous IRC meetings). While this surfaces regularly as a concern, it is important to note that the entire Policy Council, which includes five IRC members, is responsible for budgetary oversight and formal approval of the annual budget.

Options: While adding designated seats for institutional representatives on the Policy Council has created a formal linkage between the two groups, there would seem to be some value to providing increased structure and communications support around the linkage. Three options for doing so are:

- Propose that the IRC Chair and the four institutional representatives constitute a regular, working committee of the IRC. This would institutionalize attention to the IRs and provide a clear channel of communication on the Policy Council.
- Propose that the Policy Council adopt a practice of appointing one Institutional Representative member to the finance committee, to ensure that there is a voice from institutional representatives on the committee that oversees APPAM finances.
- Develop improved, dedicated communications supports of the IRC. The APPAM staff recently instituted an IRC member list-serve that can be used by members to post information about institutional activities, job searches, and the like. This will be invaluable in supporting communications among the IRC and provide another clear benefit of membership. It is suggested that the IRC also explore options for external communications, such as a blog or electronic Institutional Representatives Forum on the APPAM web site, which could facilitate information sharing to external audiences.

The focus group also mentioned that the IRC might develop a committee structure, and asked whether the committees should parallel the committees on the Policy Council. Considering that the APPAM bylaws do not provide the IRC any decision-making authority, it is not clear how a parallel structure would function or coordinate with the Policy Council. If, however, the IRC takes on a more substantive role, as discussed below, it would need to establish working committees to support this work.

*Substantive Role.* The primary channel by which the IRC has contributed to the APPAM mission has been through the Spring Conference, which for some years has been organized by the Chair, who typically calls on institutional representatives for support. Engagement in other substantive activities has varied depending on the chair, which makes sustained strategic action vulnerable to transition. In the Fall meeting, sub-groups discussed four of APPAM’s strategic issue areas, to brainstorm areas wherein the IRC might be able to play a sustained role. These areas were: Promoting Diversity; Improving Pedagogy; Supporting Ph.D. Education; and Policy Relevance. The notes from these break-out sessions are attached.

Policy relevance: The discussion of policy relevance emphasized the need to build sustainable linkages between funders and policy researchers; to build networks that keep researchers connected to policy makers throughout the research process; and to support the translation of policy into actionable policy steps. The current initiative within APPAM to support policy translation is development of a second journal that would focus primarily on translational research. A suggestion that surfaced in the discussion was for the IRC to serve as a “brain trust” that could create task forces to produce white papers on emergent policy issues. It was noted, however, that this might introduce controversy as salient policy issues often have a partisan or normative character. Considering the need for APPAM to remain nonpartisan, it would seem more appropriate for the IRC to fulfill a clearinghouse function rather than act as a producer of translational research. Again, this function could be served by the Institutional Representatives E-Forum.

Diversity: The diversity discussion emphasized the need to promote inclusion and educate students about public policy professional degrees at every stage in the pipeline, beginning at the

undergraduate level. APPAM has historically contributed to this mission through its support of PPIA, which provides a summer institute to undergraduate students from underrepresented groups. It has extended its reach to the graduate level by means of the current Equity and Inclusion Fellowships, which provide support for students to attend the APPAM Fall Research Conference. As noted, several Spring conferences have focused on issues around diversity, social equity, and inclusion. A suggestion that came from the focus group was to support additional student training opportunities and workshops; these could be coordinated with the new regional student conferences as well as the Fall conference and semi-annual Spring conference.

Pedagogy in the Masters' Degree. The discussion highlighted two roles for promoting pedagogy: the formal curriculum (recognizing and promoting effective classroom practice) and promoting application through mentoring and connection to employers and policy professionals. Considering that NASPAA promotes attention to curricular practice through accreditation, its annual conference, and the JPAE, it would seem to make sense for APPAM and the IRC to focus more closely on supporting professional networks and the development of practice skills such as digital literacy; presentation skills; grant writing; and translation and communication of policy analytic findings. These findings reinforce the opportunity for the IRC to support the regional student conferences through development of targeted professional development workshops.

Support of Doctoral Education. The break-out group concluded that APPAM's support of doctoral students could be expressed as "3 Ms: Markets; Matching; and Mentoring." The Fall conference has historically served the "market and matching" function as an interview venue, although its value varies depending on the timing of university searches. In recent years APPAM has increased its support of doctoral professional development by establishing a graduate student representative on the Policy Council and creating a student advisory committee. Working with the student committee, APPAM has created an array of student supports at the Fall conference, including a student lounge and mentoring sessions. In addition, APPAM has created the Equity and Inclusion scholarships noted above, and has initiated regional student conferences coordinated in partnership with APPAM and member institutions. The IRC is a natural source of institutional support for these efforts as it includes both institutions that train Ph.D. students and those that hire them.

Moving Forward: In sum, there are several areas in which the IRC can contribute to the strategic mission of APPAM. A semi-annual Spring Conference can provide a venue to focus on issues that are of strategic interest to the IRC. These might fall into the areas stressed above (policy relevance; diversity; pedagogy; and/or support of doctoral education), or the IRC Chair may poll the membership to identify another area of strategic interest and relevance. In addition, it is suggested that the IRC Chair, working with the IRC members on the Policy Council establish several standing committees that can promote its substantive role within APPAM through focus on tasks within the strategic areas discussed above. There are several options for these committees; two that seem particularly promising are:

- An **Outreach Committee**, charged with support of outreach to members (perhaps, through an E-Forum), as well the semi-annual Spring Conference.
- A **Committee on Graduate Student Development**, charged with promoting pedagogy; professional development; diversity of the pipeline; and general fostering of graduate students.

Additional sub-committee possibilities include Data Accountability and Reporting, Teaching and Pedagogy, Rankings, Public Ethics and Accountability, Diversity and Access, Doctoral Education and Good Governance. The goal of these sub-committees is to allow collaboration and deeper conversations between institutional members around these critical issues that affect our membership. Given the possible overlap between these issues and the responsibility areas of the standing committees designated by the Policy Council, the structure of these sub-committees, and the manner in which they interact with Policy Council, should be defined by the IRC in their formation. The committees will foster the ability of the IRC to serve as an instrument for exploring issues of common interest to its members where APPAM as an organization has not yet focused. Any recommendations from these efforts would be conveyed to the Policy Council through communication with the relevant Standing Committees of the Policy Council and the proposed IRC Committee on the Policy Council.