The Gerontological Society of America

2020 Vision for Growth and Impact

Restructuring of GSA Governance

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

“Greater involvement of more members...”

GSA Governance Survey Data Report, 2017
Q. Why is the GSA Executive Committee proposing to restructure the Society’s governance?

A. The effort to examine and update GSA’s current governance structure arose out of a desire to capitalize upon GSA’s strengths and facilitate a more strategic and efficient organization that can serve its members effectively now and in the future. This effort aims to:

- Improve alignment of GSA’s governance function and structure with strategic directions.
- Enhance efficacy of governance processes.
- Increase engagement of all members.

Q. How did GSA begin this process?

A. As a result of GSA Council action in November 2014, an Exploratory Governance Workgroup convened to explore future options in 2015. It examined issues related to the structure of the GSA governance system. Based on these initial discussions, the workgroup recommended that the GSA Council appoint an Ad Hoc Governance Workgroup to:

- Oversee a comprehensive review of GSA’s governance structure and operations.
- Propose a timeline for the process.
- Engage a consultant with organizational governance expertise to guide the process.
- Make recommendations for updating the governance structure.

The GSA Council approved this recommendation and an Ad Hoc Governance Workgroup was established.

Q. Who are the members of the Workgroup?

A. The Workgroup included representatives of each section, AGHE, ESPO and additional relevant leadership such as past presidents and members of Exploratory Governance Workgroup. There were 14 members total, chaired by the 2017 president of GSA, Barbara Resnick, PhD, CRNP, FGSA.

Q. How did the workgroup approach this undertaking?

A. This workgroup conducted an RFP process to engage an external organizational consultant to help facilitate GSA’s review of its governance structure and operations, and selected Quantum Governance, L3C as the consultant. Quantum has worked with hundreds of national and international associations and nonprofits. Quantum assessed GSA across eight critical functional areas and conducted staff interviews, focus groups with members, and surveys of current and lapsed members.

Quantum led a two-day retreat with the workgroup, consultants, and additional organizational leadership to review the current governance structure and discuss the future vision for GSA. Recommendations that emerged from this retreat included:

1. Develop a forward-looking and comprehensive strategic plan.
2. Update the vision, mission, strategic goals, objectives and metrics.
3. Adjust GSA governance structure to combine the Executive Committee and Council into some type of “combined governing body.”
4. Consider restructuring Sections and their connection to GSA governance.
5. Streamline and simplify the committee structure to make the organization more efficient and clarify expectations.
At the end of the retreat, the GSA Executive Committee established two task forces from members of the initial workgroup and current Executive Committee:

1. Task Force on Vision, Mission, and Strategic Planning
2. Task Force on Governance Structure

These groups worked independently over a period of approximately four months to establish recommendations to bring forward to the Executive Committee.

Q. What were the goals of the governance task force?

A. The task force was directed to:

1. Propose a governing body/board to succeed the present structure of the Council and the Executive Committee to include recommendations for how it will be populated.
2. Based upon the governing body proposed above, draft the framework for amended GSA Society-wide bylaws.
3. Formulate principles to guide a review of GSA Society-wide committees and recommend a modified structure that aligns with those principles.
4. Review the role of GSA sections, ESPO, and AGHE to identify ways to strengthen their roles within GSA.
5. Identify and briefly describe other retreat-inspired steps/considerations GSA should actively consider for near-term or long-term action.

Q. What are the proposed changes for restructuring GSA’s governance?

A. The recommendations that emerged include:

- The Executive Committee and the Council will be redesigned into a single governing body called the Board of Directors.
- Current sections, ESPO, and AGHE will be retained. All will operate in a consonant manner.
- Sections will focus efforts on professional, educational, and scientific activities rather than on GSA-wide governance.
- A simplified committee structure will be created to include:
  - Two committees of the board that report to the board—the Governance Committee and the Finance Committee
  - Two committees of the organization that work closely with the GSA staff—the Membership Committee and the Program, Publications, & Products Committee.

The proposed governance changes will enable a new approach that focuses on strategic thinking. The board will be charged with governance oversight enabling the sections to focus on professional, educational, and scientific matters. The sections can form volunteer-led committees and task forces to advance scientific, educational, and professional activities.

Q. How will the Sections operate?

A. Sections will continue to be an avenue for networking and connecting with others in the aging ecosystem and may engage in various activities to support these goals.

- Section chairs will be elected by their respective memberships.
  - The Governance Committee will oversee section chair elections. Section officers will provide two nominations to the Governance Committee for the section elections. Section chair service will be separated from service on the Board of Directors.
• Section leaders will serve on the Program, Publications, & Products Committee and the Membership Committee. These leaders will be integral for planning the annual meeting, administering award and Fellow recipient selection, and supporting development of new programs and products.
• Each section may develop volunteer-led communities and ad-hoc task forces to complete specific projects or initiatives in accordance with the strategic plan. Early career members will be included in working groups.
• Any GSA member will now be able to join more than one section, probably making a primary and secondary choice.

Q. Who will serve on the Board of Directors under the proposed structure?

A. The proposed structure of the Board of Directors includes 13 members who serve staggered three-year terms:

• Board Officers:
  o President
  o Vice President (formerly the president-elect)
  o Board Chair (formerly the past president)
  o Treasurer
  o Secretary

• Board Members:
  o Five elected members, including one member who is within five years of completing the terminal degree (early career).
  o Up to three appointed members outside of the GSA membership with skills that are valuable to implementation of the current strategic plan.

Q. What is the relationship between the individual sections and Board positions?

A. The Governance Committee will be charged with ensuring the broad disciplinary diversity of the GSA membership is included within the make-up of the Board. Full representation of GSA disciplinary groups will be preserved. All positions of the board will be open to all members. Individuals on the board will represent the entire Society in a cohesive and integrated fashion. This shift was strongly recommended by the findings from Quantum.

Quantum emphasized that, to advance the Society as a whole, a board must act as a unit and speak with one voice. To function in this manner, board members should be accountable to the entire organization, rather than a constituency. Therefore, members should be elected by the entire organization.

Q. Why are there seats on Board for appointed members?

A. The addition of appointed members was highlighted as a useful strategy to bring specific skill sets that are important for implementation of the strategic plan. These board members will be appointed by the Board of Directors to bring a specific background and/or expertise (e.g., accounting, finance, technology, government agency, regulatory science, fundraising).

Q. How will board members be elected?

A. Board members will be elected by the GSA membership. The Governance Committee would oversee the nominations process and develop the nomination slate. The Governance Committee will include the board chair, secretary and the three immediate past board chairs (formerly the past president). The section chairs will recommend names of potential nominees from their sections to the governance committee for the election slate.
Q. Who will be on the Finance Committee and what would they do?

A. The Finance Committee will include the board treasurer, vice president and three members of the board. These individuals would oversee the annual budget, conduct long range financial planning, ensure integrity of financial processes, and provide investment guidance.

Q. What about the Membership Committee and Programs, Publications, & Products Committee?

A. These committees would have similar structures. Each of these committee would have 16 members including three individuals appointed by the president and one board of director member. One of the appointed members will be designated for an early career member. The section immediate past chairs and past chairs would serve on the Membership Committee. The section chairs and vice-chairs would serve on the Programs, Publications and Products Committee. The chair of the committee would be appointed by the president.

The Membership Committee would oversee fellowship, awards, mentoring, the interest groups, and member retention, recruitment, and engagement.

The Programs, Publications, and Products Committee will focus on the Annual Scientific Meeting, publications, and other new products or services to be developed.

Q. How will the Membership Committee and Programs, Publications, & Products Committee complete all their work?

A. The concatenation of these committees will enable a more centralized planning process. Additional subcommittees will be formed to complete time limited tasks as required (i.e., editor search, annual meeting decision process, reviewing Fellow applications).

Q. Why are some committees being renamed as advisory panels, and what is the difference between the two?

A. An objective of the new governance structure is to provide members with greater opportunity to participate in programmatic activities. By changing a committee to an advisory panel, there will be fewer administrative requirements, time commitments will be more flexible, and there will be more opportunities for engagement. Advisory panels are designed to accomplish tasks according to specific objectives within a designated time frame as needed. This approach provides members flexibility to participate in advisory panels according to their schedules, and it will maintain the intent of encouraging dynamism and engagement of GSA members. The Board of Directors will have the opportunity to create advisory panels on an ongoing basis to meet evolving society needs. Advisory panels will not have a governance role but will provide guidance and expertise to the Board of Directors and staff. Moving forward, there will only be four committees with a defined governance role, which will be strategic, focused on policy, and will report to the board. The committees’ work will be based on the direction of the Board of Directors at the beginning of the term year.

Q. Which current committees are being renamed as advisory panels and what specific tasks are they being asked to do?

A. The Humanities and Arts Committee, Minority Issues in Gerontology Committee, Public Policy Committee, and Presidents’ Cabinet are being renamed as advisory panels and will maintain the intent of encouraging dynamism and engagement of GSA members. These groups will bring unique knowledge and skills to provide expertise to the Board of Directors and staff. The advisory panels will make recommendations and focus on specific programs that support the organization and major themes within the scholarship of aging. Programming may include developing sessions and
networking opportunities at the Annual Scientific Meeting, participating in webinars throughout the year, engaging members through GSA connect, and enhancing the value of GSA membership.

Q. Will there continue to be opportunities for volunteer engagement?

A. Yes. Although the number of GSA committees has decreased, there will be an increase in the number of volunteer opportunities. These opportunities will include a variety of time commitments and enable more GSA members to be involved (i.e. new member welcome outreach, peer review, webinar speaker, interest group convener, etc.).

Q. What are the next steps?

A. On November 14, 2018 at the Annual Scientific Meeting, the GSA Council voted and approved the final recommendations. The amended bylaws and articles of incorporation were put to a full membership vote from January 10-31, 2019. A majority of members who voted agreed to adopt the amended bylaws and articles of incorporation. These amendments will take effect November 1, 2019.

Q. What will happen to the governance structure in 2019?

A. GSA will continue to operate under the current bylaws in 2019.

The amended bylaws were approved in January 2019 by the membership. 2019 will serve as a transition year. The amended bylaws will take effect November 1, 2019.