GSA INTEREST GROUP POLICIES

Interest Group Definition: An interest group should be formed around a topic or issue that cuts across disciplines and existing Sections in the Society, primarily for the purpose of organizing discussions or programs at, but not during, the scientific portion of annual meetings. The mission of the interest group must be consistent with that of the Society's as approved by Council, "to promote the conduct of multi- and interdisciplinary research in aging by expanding the quantity of and improving the quality of gerontological research, and by increasing its funding resources. To disseminate gerontological research knowledge to researchers, practitioners and decision and opinion makers."

I. INTEREST GROUPS (IGs) – Interest groups are designated by Council on the recommendation of the Committee on IGs.

A. Procedures and Criteria for Establishing an Interest Group (IG)

1. Organizers must submit a formal request to the Interest Group Executive Committee. Forms for this purpose will be provided by the Society office (gschoen@geron.org). Submitted applications should contain:
   a. A statement of purpose covering:
      i. the mission(s) of the Society (as stated in the Society's bylaws) to be served;
      ii. the interests of group members to be served; and
      iii. the potential to attract new members to the Society;
   b. Name of at least one convener. IG can have multiple conveners and if inclined, designate one as the primary convener or point of contact to GSA; and
   c. General descriptions of initial activities (nature of discussion group or program).
      i. IG Committee members will rate the application on the criteria listed above and its distinction from other active Interest Groups using an Evaluation Review Rubric form provided by the Society office. Applicants receiving an average score of 4.0 or greater on each rubric items will be approved, barring any concerns that cannot be resolved by the applicants.
      ii. Applications may be submitted at any time. Evaluations will be reviewed at quarterly IG committee meetings (January, April, July, and October).
      iii. IG applications approved by January 31st in a given year will be able to participate in the process of submitting an IG symposium for the upcoming Society meetings (see guidelines) and will be eligible for IG meeting space.
      iv. IG applications approved by July in a given year will be able to request meeting space for the upcoming Society meetings (see Conveners’ Handbook).

2. Conveners must be members of the Society. There is no time limit on how long a convener can stay in the role, but it is encouraged to provide all IG members the opportunity to serve as a convener if interested.
3. Any listing of a proposed interest group's material (including information on activities, meetings, and projects) via print or electronic media (e.g. e-mail, Internet) must be shared with the GSA Office (gschoen@geron.org) and must include the following disclaimer:

"Users are expected to use good judgment as to the appropriateness of material posted. No commercial advertising is permitted. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of The Gerontological Society of America."

B. Criteria for Maintaining Active Status as an IG

1. Membership size. IGs need to maintain a membership of at least 10 active GSA members. If the number of active GSA members falls below 10 for more than two consecutive years, then, during the 3-year IG review, the Committee on IGs will work with the IG to identify opportunities for growing membership or determining if it is time to sunset the IG.

2. Annual reports
   a. Each IG will complete and submit an online annual report by January 15th to the Society reporting:
      i. the content of its annual meeting program and/or business meeting;
      ii. the number of persons attending the session;
      iii. representation in membership from more than one Section;
      iv. new attendees at the IG meeting;
      v. non-GSA members attending the annual IG meeting;
      vi. plans for the coming year (e.g., a sponsored symposium, collaboration on journal articles); and
      vii. leadership for the coming year
   b. A link to the web-based annual report form will be provided by the Society office. Also, staff will provide conveners with attendance sheets at the annual meeting for the IG meetings. A digital copy of the sign in sheet from the IG meeting is requested with the annual report submission. Conveners will be responsible for collecting the information at their annual meetings.

3. If the interest group is one year delinquent in filing an annual report:
   a. the IG forfeits their sponsored IG symposium highlighted in the GSA program at the next annual meeting, and
   b. the IG may not be allocated business meeting space at the next annual meeting. Space may be allocated, pending a decision made by the IG Committee.

4. If an IG is delinquent in submitting an annual report for two consecutive years:
   a. The IG forfeits their sponsored IG symposium highlighted in the GSA program at the next annual meeting, and
   b. the IG will not be allocated business meeting space at the next annual meeting.
5. If an IG is delinquent for two years and is up for its 3-year review:
a. The IG will be notified that their IG will not be renewed as an IG until annual reports are submitted. An official letter stating the change in status will be sent from the Society from the IG Committee Chair.
b. The IG will not be allocated business meeting space at the coming year’s annual meeting.

C. Full IG Review every 3 Years

1. IGs will be reviewed on a three-year cycle to ensure that they are still active and there is interest among GSA members. The Committee on IGs will use the IG’s three most recent annual reports to evaluate IGs for continuation on the basis of:
a. activity occurred within the three-year period (e.g. organized or sponsored a symposium, held a business meeting, coordinated on a GSA-related project);
b. at least one active convener (must be a GSA member);
c. completeness of the submission of annual reports;
d. membership of at least 10 active Society members.

Any IG not meeting these criteria will receive a letter from the Society alerting them to the status of their IG. The Committee and GSA staff will work with the IG to determine if there is an interest among IG members to reinvigorate the IG and if not, the IG will be sunset.

D. Sponsored GSA Program Symposia

1. All IGs will be offered an opportunity to sponsor a single symposium which is recognized in the annual GSA Scientific Meeting program. The symposium can be selected in one of two ways:
a. IGs can select a symposium to sponsor from among those that scored highly enough in peer review to be accepted for presentation at the annual GSA meeting.
   i. IGs are encouraged to organize their own symposia. If an IG organizes a symposium and it is accepted after peer review, the IG can select to sponsor that symposium. It is recommended that during the symposium submission process, the applicant indicates that the symposium is related to an interest group in addition to identifying session codes. (See Notifying GSA of an IG’s Sponsored Symposium)
   ii. If the IG’s submitted symposium was not accepted, or the IG did not choose to organize a symposium, the IG convener can select a symposium to sponsor from a report that GSA staff share with conveners listing all accepted abstracts with relevant session codes for identifying that the topic is related to the IG. (See Notifying GSA of an IG’s Sponsored Symposium)
b. IGs can apply for an exemption from peer review by e-mail to the IG Committee chair at the same time that they submit their symposium abstract online.
   i. The IG convener is responsible for requesting the exemption form from the Chair of the Committee on IGs no later than one month prior to the abstract deadline. This process will enable the Committee on IGs to be aware of the potential number of exemption requests so as to report this to the GSA Program Planning Committee Chair. The application must detail why the proposed symposium is inappropriate for the Section-based peer review process. Potential examples include that the science does not fall under a specific GSA section, invitation of a special non-GSA member speaker, etc.
   ii. No more than 12 exemptions will be provided. This process should only be used for symposia with a clear need for an alternative review process and is not intended to provide a mechanism to circumvent competitive review.
   iii. Symposia selected for exemption will receive an e-mail within two weeks notifying them that their symposium has been accepted for exemption. Symposia not selected for exemption will be referred for peer review and will receive notification at the same time as all other peer reviewed symposia.
   iv. Applications will be reviewed and evaluated by the Interest Group Committee and scored based on the justification for a special process outside of normal peer-review. All applicants will receive at least at least four reviews.

2. Only IGs who submitted an on-time annual report the previous year are eligible to have their symposium recognized in the GSA Meeting Program as an official sponsored Symposium.

3. Notifying GSA of an IG’s Sponsored Symposium:
   a. GSA will send an e-mail to IG conveners requesting notification of their symposium. In the email a report of all symposia that were accepted using the relevant session codes as a filter will be attached. The IG will choose from this report which symposium they will sponsor. These are confidential communications not to be shared beyond the conveners until ALL abstract submission authors are notified.
   b. Symposium sponsorship selection must be made by the deadline provided in the email from GSA staff. If the deadline is missed, staff will be unable to guarantee consideration of scheduling requests and promotion in onsite materials.

E. Annual Business Meeting

1. Each IG will be offered the opportunity to rank order their selection of times and days during which the IG would provide space for an annual business meeting. At least a portion of this time slot must be devoted to group business. The majority of this time may be scheduled for scientific presentations, workshops, roundtables, posters, etc. The announcement of the IGs’ business meeting will be carried in the forward part of the annual meeting program, in the “Day-at-a-Glance,” and incorporated into the regular daily program schedule.

2. IG’s are encouraged to use the Society's newsletter and GSA Connect to communicate group updates, news, and information.
3. IGs can sponsor a pre-conference workshop following the regulations stipulated in the Protocol for Pre-Conference Workshops. Pre-conference workshops are subject to the review and approval of the Society's Program Committee.

4. Staff will work with interest group and section annual meeting program chairs to ensure participation by group members in the peer review of abstracts submitted to the regular annual meeting program.

5. IGs may raise funds from voluntary contributions of IG participants for refreshments only during the annual meeting. With prior approval of the Executive Director, groups may also secure funds from outside non-GSA sources to pay for mailings and interest group activities. The Society can act as a depository for such outside, non-GSA checks but will not service individual contributions from interest group members.

6. IGs are asked to inform GSA about IG-related activities held outside the annual meeting.

F. Support of the GSA Mission

1. GSA may contact IG members as a resource to review legislation, regulations, and other policies being considered as well as for activities in which the Society is asked to participate.