ARO Council Meeting Minutes

Date: October 23, 2025
Attendees: Kristin Johnson, Ronna Hertzano, Lisa Cunningham, Alain Dabdoub, Kate Fernandez, Jeffrey Holt, Anna Lysakowski, Maria Eulalia Rubio, Katherine Kindt, Catalina Velez Ortega, Avril Genene Holt, Mike Bowl

1. Awards Committee Update

Summary: Katherine Kindt and Maria Eulalia Rubio, Awards Committee Co-Chairs provided an overview of recent award selections:

- Award of Merit: Fred Lee Nuttall
- Pioneer Award in Basic Science: Ana Belen Elgoyhen
- Innovator Award in Clinical Science: Anil Lalwani
- Young Investigator Award: Ksenia Gnedeva

Committee discussed challenges in increasing nominations for the Clinical Innovator Award and proposed creating an additional award for early-career postdoctoral researchers. Suggestions included non-monetary recognition (certificate) and waived registration. Discussion also covered committee composition and diversity guidelines, including representation by previous Award of Merit recipients, gender balance, international members, and audiologists.

Decisions Made:

- Explore creation of a new certificate-based award for postdoctoral fellows.
- Maintain Clinical Innovator Award but improve promotion and outreach.
- Committee will draft recommendations for membership composition and diversity guidelines.

Action Items:

- Awards Committee to draft proposal for new postdoctoral award and updated committee composition guidelines.

2. Travel Awards Committee Update

Summary: Catalina Velez Ortega, Travel Awards Committee Chair, reported on travel award operations:

- Current payline remains ~50% of applicants funded.
- Application numbers peaked post-COVID but have normalized.
- Guidelines clarified eligibility and reduced ineligible applications.
- Discussion on budget allocation process and potential industry sponsorship for additional awards.
  Ideas included featuring top awardees in poster blitz sessions or recognition slides during the meeting.

Decisions Made:

- Maintain current payline (~50%).
- Explore industry sponsorship opportunities for travel awards.
- Consider recognition strategies for top awardees (slides, ribbons, certificates).

Action Items:

- Catalina Velez Ortega to send historical application and funding data to Kristin Johnson.
- Kristin Johnson to analyze financial trends and explore sponsorship opportunities one data is received.
- Kristin Johnson to coordinate recognition options for Don Henderson Award winners (e.g., ribbons, slide deck).

3. Administrative Budget Approval

Summary: Kristin Johnson presented the 2026 administrative budget, including income projections (membership dues, sponsorships) and expenses (management fees, audit, insurance, mini-grants). Transportation costs for the Midwinter Meeting were discussed, with anticipated savings from shuttle service renegotiation (from $50K to $27K).

Decisions Made:

- Approved 2026 administrative budget as presented, with anticipated adjustments for shuttle savings.
- Extend shuttle service on Hairball night for attendees to be able to easily return to the convention center for the gathering.

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson to finalize shuttle contract and confirm extended service for Tuesday evening.
- Kristin Johnson to send hotel booking guidance and calendar invites to council members.

4. Passport Program and Incentives

Summary: Kristin Johnson reviewed the attendee engagement passport program. Current prizes include complimentary membership and registration for next year. Discussion included adding ARO T-shirts and potential vendor-sponsored prizes.

Decisions Made:

- Maintain current prize structure (membership and registration).
- Consider adding T-shirts and vendor-sponsored prizes for future years.

Action Items:

- None.

5. Clinician Scientist Committee Proposal

Summary: Committee requested $3,100 for a networking event. Council discussed fairness, event purpose, and budget implications. Consensus was to support the event at a reduced amount and ensure outreach to trainees.

Decisions Made:

- Approve $1,500 for Clinician Scientist networking event.
- Event should be promoted as trainee networking opportunity.

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson to coordinate event logistics and ensure promotion through meeting materials.
- Clinician Scientist Committee to engage spARO representatives for trainee outreach.

6. Hearing Inclusive ARO Proposal

Summary: HI-ARO requested ARO assistance in processing Regeneron sponsorship for their annual dinner and AV needs. ARO will facilitate invoicing and reimbursement through Regeneron's system.

Decisions Made:

- Approve ARO facilitation of Regeneron sponsorship for HI-ARO dinner and AV costs.

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson to manage sponsorship application and invoicing with HI-ARO assistance.

7. Additional Updates

Summary:

- Registration numbers are ahead of last year by ~50 participants.
- Hotel booking instructions and council meeting logistics will be shared soon.

Decisions Made:

- None

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson to send hotel and meeting details to council members.

Summary of Topics Discussed

- Awards Committee updates and new award considerations.
- Travel Awards Committee operations and recognition strategies.
- Approval of 2026 administrative budget and shuttle service adjustments.
- Passport program incentives and engagement ideas.
- Funding for Clinician Scientist networking event.
- HI-ARO sponsorship facilitation.
- Registration and hotel logistics update.

Decisions Made (Consolidated)

- Create proposal for new postdoctoral award.
- Maintain Clinical Innovator Award; improve promotion.
- Awards Committee to draft diversity and composition guidelines.
- Maintain travel award payline; explore sponsorship opportunities.
- Approve 2026 administrative budget; extend shuttle service on Hairball night.
- Keep passport prize structure; consider T-shirts for future.
- Approve $1,500 for Clinician Scientist networking event.
- Approve ARO facilitation of Regeneron sponsorship for HIARO dinner.

Action Items (Consolidated)

- **Awards Committee:** Draft proposals for new award and committee guidelines.
- **Kristin Johnson:**
    - Finalize shuttle contract and extended service.
    - Send hotel booking guidance and calendar invites.
    - Analyze financial trends and explore sponsorships once historical travel award data is received.
    - Coordinate recognition for Don Henderson Award winners.
    - Manage HI-ARO sponsorship application and invoicing.
- **Catalina Velez Ortega:** Send historical travel award data to Kristin Johnson.
- **Clinician Scientist Committee:** Promote networking event to trainees; engage SPARO reps.