ARO Council Meeting Minutes
Date: December 18, 2025
Attendees: Kristin Johnson, Alain Dabdoub, Anna Lysakowski, Mike Bowl, Radha Kalluri, Katharine Fernandez, Sonia Pyott, Jeffrey Holt, Kayla Hill, Yuri Agrawal, Ronna Hertzano, Lisa Cunningham, Kayla Hill, Christine Farwell

1. Welcome and Introductions

Summary:
Kristin Johnson opened the meeting, confirmed quorum, and welcomed Council members and guests, including first-time attendee Kayla Hill with Parthenon Management Group. The group briefly acknowledged the upcoming holiday break and then moved into the formal agenda, noting that some committee chair updates would be deferred to the January or February meetings due to scheduling challenges around the holidays.

Decisions Made:

- Meeting proceeded with available Council members and guests; absent committee chairs will report in January or at the Midwinter Meeting.

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson to move any outstanding committee reports to the January or Midwinter Meeting agendas.

2. Midwinter Meeting Updates

Summary:
Kristin provided a status update on the upcoming Midwinter Meeting. Registration numbers are ahead of typical levels for this point in the cycle, with early-bird registration open until **January 5**. The overall meeting budget is tracking well; the only category slightly over projections is staff travel due to higher-than-expected airfare costs, which is offset by savings in other areas. The team is developing a series of promotional emails highlighting scientific sessions, social events, and new engagement activities, including a cocktail/mocktail reception, a “passport” prize activity, a nearby Bad Bunny halftime watch party, salsa dancing instructional, and other networking opportunities. Session descriptions and abstracts are now largely in place, enabling more targeted promotion.

Decisions Made:

- Proceed with current registration and budget plans, acknowledging minor staff travel overages as acceptable within the overall budget.
- Proceed with planned promotional email campaigns highlighting sessions, social events, and early-bird registration deadlines.

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson and the meetings team to:
    - Finalize and send registration reminder emails leading up to the January 5 early-bird deadline.
    - Incorporate session highlights and special events (cocktail/mocktail, passport activity, Bad Bunny watch party, salsa dancing, etc.) into upcoming communications.

3. Local Student / Postdoc Registration Pilot Program

Summary:
Prompted by a request Ronna received from a contact in Puerto Rico, Council discussed creating an outreach-oriented registration option for **local students and postdocs** at Midwinter Meeting locations. The goal is to reduce financial barriers for local trainees (e.g., audiology students, medical students, graduate students, postdocs) who are **not presenting** but may benefit from exposure to ARO. Ronna proposed offering local, non-presenting students and postdocs the opportunity to attend for **$25 per day for up to two days**, with proof of local residency (e.g., driver's license) and clear badge indications.

Council discussed practical considerations, including:

- How to monitor access to sessions and receptions (badges and visual indicators rather than door security).
- The possibility of capping the number of discounted registrants, particularly in larger cities.
- Managing coffee and catering demand.
- Ensuring bartenders card all attendees at events serving alcohol, especially given potential undergraduate participation.
- Despite implementation complexities, Council agreed that the outreach benefits outweigh the risks. The motion to proceed with the pilot passed by majority vote.

Decisions Made:

- **Approved** a pilot **local student/postdoc registration category**:
    - Eligibility: Local, non-presenting students (undergraduate, graduate, medical, audiology) and postdocs residing in the host city/region.
    - Rate: **$25 per day, for up to two days** per person.
    - Proof: Documentation of local residency required at registration.
    - Access: Scientific sessions, posters, and core networking events (e.g., SPARO events), subject to standard ID checks for alcohol consumption.
- Accepted that access will be managed primarily via badge design/indicators and standard badge checks, not room-by-room security.
- Agreed that a **cap on the number of discounted local registrations** may be implemented per meeting if needed for capacity or catering reasons.

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson to:
    - Work with the registration/IT teams to create the **Local Student/Postdoc** registration category, including pricing, documentation requirements, and badge indicators.
    - Develop a process to cap the number of discounted registrations if demand exceeds capacity and clearly communicate when the cap is reached.
    - Coordinate with on-site catering and venue staff to adjust coffee and refreshments as needed based on actual attendance.
- Ronna to:
    - Draft outreach language and strategy for contacting local universities, audiology programs, medical schools, and graduate programs in future host cities, introducing the discounted registration option.
- Meetings staff to:
    - Ensure bartenders and caterers are instructed to **check IDs** at events where alcohol is served.

4. JARO Editor Transition Planning

Summary:

Kristin and Ronna updated Council on an important development regarding the **JARO Editor-in-Chief** role. In a recent conversation, the current Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Christopher Cederroth, indicated his intention to step away from his contract **sometime in 2026**, without

a firm timeline. This raises the possibility of a gap between his departure and the appointment of a new editor.

- Kristin has already contacted **Springer** to clarify how they can support ARO in the search process, including drafting a call and recommending best practices. Council discussed the need for:
- Launching the **search early**, rather than waiting for a formal resignation date.
- Identifying a **potential interim editor** (or small interim team) who could step in should there be a gap, recognizing that this would be a substantial favor to ARO.
- Considering previous JARO leaders or senior editorial figures as possible interim candidates (names mentioned included individuals such as past editors and senior investigators, but no specific commitments were made).

Decisions Made:

- Begin preparations for a **formal search** for the next JARO Editor-in-Chief in collaboration with Springer, aiming to issue a call around the Midwinter Meeting.
- Develop a **contingency plan** involving one or more experienced editorial leaders who could serve as an interim editor if needed.

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson to:
    - Continue discussions with **Springer** to define the search process and responsibilities.
    - Draft a **call for applications** or nominations for the next JARO Editor-in-Chief, targeting release at or around the Midwinter Meeting.
    - Consult with Council leadership about potential interim editor candidates and confirm willingness to serve if a gap arises.
- Council members to:
    - Provide names and suggestions for potential interim and long-term Editor-in-Chief candidates to Kristin and Rona.
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5. Outreach Award Program Proposal

Summary:

Mike Bowl presented a proposal from his committee to create an **ARO Outreach Award** to encourage and recognize members' outreach within their local communities, especially

activities that promote hearing health, noise-induced hearing loss prevention, and awareness of hearing research careers. The initial focus is on **school-age outreach**, with standardized slide decks being developed for elementary and junior-high audiences by spARO members.

Key elements discussed:

- The award would recognize members (particularly trainees/spARO members) who deliver classroom or community outreach on hearing health and research careers.
- Proposed recognition: free registration to the next Midwinter Meeting (initially for one awardee), plus a certificate and recognition at the awards ceremony.
- A dedicated **Outreach/Community Engagement page** on the ARO website could showcase activities and photos (with appropriate permissions), emphasizing ARO's public-facing impact.
- The group discussed using and/or adapting materials from the NIH **"Noisy Planet"** program, which has been taken offline, and Kate Fernandez offered to locate and share any remaining materials and active related resources (e.g., **dB Zone**).
- Ronna suggested that the **Hearing Health Foundation (HHF)** might be a strategic partner to help co-fund or scale the program (e.g., supporting multiple awardees).
- After discussion, Council expressed strong support for the initiative and agreed to launch it with multiple award levels.

Decisions Made:

- **Approved** the establishment of the **ARO Outreach Award Program**, to be launched at the Midwinter Meeting.
- **Approved** three award tiers: **First, Second, and Third Place**, each receiving **free registration to the subsequent Midwinter Meeting**, plus:
    - Recognition in the awards ceremony.
    - A certificate and prominent listing on the ARO website.
- Confirmed that the program's initial focus will be **school-based hearing health outreach**, with standardized slide decks for different age groups, but other outreach venues (museums, libraries, public events, etc.) remain eligible.
- Agreed that outcome measures (number of students reached, depth/quality of engagement, creativity, etc.) will be defined and reported annually; the program may

later expand (e.g., more awardees or co-sponsorship with HHF) once there is a year of experience.

Action Items:

- Mike Bowl to:
    - Lead completion of age-appropriate **slide decks** for elementary and junior-high students.
    - Develop draft **selection criteria** and an application/nomination process for the Outreach Awards (including documentation expectations such as brief narratives, photos with appropriate permissions, and testimonials/quotes where feasible).
    - Coordinate with spARO to promote the program and encourage member participation.
    - Explore a potential **partnership with the Hearing Health Foundation** to co-support Outreach Award registrations or expand the number of awardees; report back to Council.
    - Prepare an **annual report** on outreach activities and award outcomes for Council.
- Kristin Johnson to:
    - Work with web and communications staff to create a **dedicated Outreach page** on the ARO website to showcase the program, resources, and awardees.

6. Awards Committee Composition and Diversity Guidelines

Summary:

Council reviewed a draft proposal from the Awards Committee co-chairs outlining desired **composition and diversity guidelines** for the Awards Committee. The proposal included: two co-chairs plus eight standing members (total of ten), at least 30% women, one to two non-US members, at least one audiologist, at least two clinicians, and coverage of major research domains (e.g., hair cells/afferents, efferents, central, clinical/audiology, vestibular).

Discussion focused on whether the proposed **"minimum 30% women"** requirement was appropriate given that ARO membership is roughly **50/50 by gender**, and on the importance of non-US representation. Suggestions included:

- Aiming for **gender balance** rather than a low minimum threshold, e.g., a minimum of **40% of each gender** or a stated expectation of approximate parity to reflect membership demographics.
- Ensuring at least **two non-US members**, given that about 25% of membership is international.
- Framing requirements as "must consider gender balance and international representation" rather than overly rigid numeric quotas, while still avoiding situations such as "3 women / 7 men" for multiple years.
- Council agreed the concept is sound but requested revisions before a formal vote.

Decisions Made:

- **Deferred final approval** of the Awards Committee composition guidelines pending revisions.
- Reached consensus that the updated proposal should:
    - Aim for **gender balance** (or at least a clearly higher minimum than 30% women, e.g., ≥40% of each gender), aligned with membership demographics.
    - Specify at least **two non-US members**.
    - Maintain representation of audiologists, clinicians, and diverse scientific expertise.
- **Action Items:**
- Kristin Johnson to:
    - Compile Council feedback (gender balance expectations, non-US representation, and expertise coverage) and send it first to **Alain Dabdoub** to confirm accuracy, then forward the consolidated feedback to the Awards Committee co-chairs.
- Awards Committee Co-Chairs (with input from Alain) to:
    - Revise the Awards Committee composition proposal incorporating Council's guidance and bring a final version back to Council for approval at a future meeting.

7. Early-Career / Pre-Faculty Award and Young Investigator Criteria

Summary:

Council reviewed a draft proposal for a new **training/early-career award** intended to recognize outstanding research contributions by individuals who do **not** yet hold faculty

positions (e.g., postdocs, residents, audiology trainees). Discussion highlighted significant complexity in equitably comparing:

- Research-intensive postdocs (often with many years of full-time research),
- Medical residents and fellows (with heavy clinical duties and more limited protected research time), and
- Audiology trainees (with varying clinical and research expectations).
- Members also questioned how this new award would differ from existing **travel awards** and how it would interact with the **Geraldine Dietz Fox Young Investigator Award** ("Young Investigator Award"), which some felt has drifted toward recognizing mid-career investigators.

Suggestions included:

- Reframing the new award as a **"pre-faculty/early investigator"** recognition (explicitly for non-faculty) while tightening the criteria for the Young Investigator Award.
- Re-examining the Young Investigator Award's time-based eligibility (e.g., years since PhD, residency, or postdoctoral training) so that it remains truly early-career rather than mid-career.
- Explicitly acknowledging **career breaks** (e.g., parental leave, caregiving, health breaks), so they do not count against an individual's eligibility window.
- Avoiding over-complex combinations of time since PhD, residency, and multiple postdocs that could unfairly disadvantage some paths.
- Council agreed that both the proposed new award and the current Young Investigator criteria need further development.

Decisions Made:

- **Deferred approval** of the proposed pre-faculty/trainee excellence award pending substantial revision.
- Agreed that the **Young Investigator Award criteria** should be re-examined to ensure:
    - It remains focused on genuinely **early-career investigators**, not mid-career.
    - Eligibility windows appropriately account for **career breaks**.

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson to:

    - Draft a detailed summary of Council feedback on the proposed pre-faculty/trainee award and Young Investigator Award criteria and send it to **Alain Dabdoub** for review.
    - After Alain's review, forward the consolidated feedback to the Awards Committee co-chairs.
- Awards Committee Co-Chairs (with Alain) to:
    - Rework both the **new early-career/pre-faculty award concept** and the **Young Investigator Award eligibility criteria**, explicitly including language around career breaks and clarifying the intended career stage.
    - Present revised proposals to Council at a future meeting for discussion and vote.

8. Late-Breaking Abstract Session Selection

Summary:
Council and members of the Program Committee (including Jeff Holt, Sonia Pyott, and Kayla Hill) discussed the new **Late-Breaking Abstract (LBA) Session**. This year's process solicited late submissions to create a one-hour session of **four 15-minute talks**.

Key issues raised:

- Several top-scoring abstracts clustered in **gene therapy** and the auditory periphery, many led by PIs at major (often Ivy League) US institutions.
- Concerns that the provisional top four over-represent one topic and one demographic (US, peripheral, PI-led) with **no central nervous system representation** and limited vestibular content.
- Some submissions had already been **publicly presented, widely promoted, or even published**, challenging their status as truly "late-breaking."
- Some abstracts described **preliminary/pilot data** or negative findings; views differed on whether such content is appropriate for a late-breaking **featured talk** session.
- Council debated whether the session should have a **single theme** (e.g., gene therapy) versus representing a **diverse cross-section** of topics. Most members ultimately favored diversity, with the unifying theme being that the work is genuinely late-breaking, not merely late-submitted.
- Despite these concerns, there was consensus that a few submissions clearly merited inclusion; others required more scrutiny.

Decisions Made:

- **Accepted** the **top two** scored Late-Breaking Abstracts for the session.
- Decided that the remaining **two** late-breaking slots will be selected after **further review**, guided by the following principles:
    - **Unpublished** work that was **not available by the regular abstract deadline** (September 15).
    - Preference for abstracts that have **not already been widely presented or publicized**.
    - Attention to **topic diversity** (e.g., inclusion of vestibular and/or central topics where appropriate), as well as diversity of presenters (gender, institution, geographic representation).
    - Avoiding dominance by a single institution or lab within the same session.
- Agreed that, for future years, "Late-Breaking" should be more tightly defined and communicated to avoid the LBA mechanism becoming simply "late submission."

Process Agreed for Final Selection This Year:

- Keep the **January 7** meeting on the calendar as a backup.
- In the near term, Council members will each send Kristin **their top two choices** for the remaining LBA slots, applying the agreed criteria.
- If consensus emerges via email, the final four talks will be confirmed without an additional meeting; otherwise, the January 7 meeting will be used to finalize selections.

Future-Year Process Guidance (Non-binding, for Program Committee planning):

- The LBA submission form should:
    - Require a **~100-word justification** explaining why the work is truly late-breaking (e.g., data not available by the original abstract deadline earlier in the year, newly completed analyses, etc.).
    - Explicitly state that late-breaking abstracts must describe **unpublished** research that could not reasonably have been submitted during the regular period.
- The Program Committee may consider alternatives or supplements such as:
    - Having regular abstract reviewers **flag particularly exciting abstracts** during the main review to be considered for special highlighted sessions.
    - Potentially using LBAs for **posters** rather than limiting to a small number of talks, depending on future demand and logistics.

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson to:
    - Email Council summarizing the agreed **criteria and process** for selecting the remaining two LBAs.
    - Collect each Council member's **top two** recommendations and work with the Program Committee to determine if consensus is reached.
    - Confirm the final list of four LBA talks or, if needed, keep the January 7 meeting to complete selection.
- Kayla Hill and Program Committee leadership to:
    - Update LBA submission guidelines and forms for next year to include a **late-breaking justification field** and clear "unpublished/not available by Sept 15" language.
    - Use Council's diversity and late-breaking guidance when finalizing the 2025 LBA session.
- Council Members to:
    - Review the LBA abstracts and send their **two recommended additions** to Kristin, applying the agreed criteria.

9. Deferred Items and Next Steps

Summary:

Due to time constraints and the length of the late-breaking discussion, several items—most notably a discussion on using **JARO supplement pages to highlight the Midwinter Meeting**—were deferred to the **January Council agenda**. The meeting concluded with thanks to Council members and wishes for a restful holiday period.

Decisions Made:

- Remaining agenda items, including the **JARO supplement pages** discussion, will be moved to the **January Council meeting**.

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson to:
    - Add deferred items (including the JARO supplement pages for the Midwinter Meeting) to the **January Council agenda**.

Summary

The ARO Council meeting focused on key operational and strategic topics ahead of the Midwinter Meeting. Kristin reported strong registration trends, solid budget performance, and robust plans for promotional communications and special events. Council approved a new **local student/postdoc discounted registration pilot** to enhance outreach to trainees in host cities.

Council began planning for a future **JARO Editor-in-Chief transition**, agreeing to launch an early search in coordination with Springer and to identify an interim editor if needed. Mike Bowl's **Outreach Award Program** proposal received enthusiastic support, with Council approving three registration-based awards and a dedicated web presence to showcase hearing health outreach, especially to school-age audiences.

On the awards governance side, Council provided substantial feedback to refine **Awards Committee composition guidelines** and the proposed **pre-faculty/early-career award**, as well as to revisit **Young Investigator Award criteria** so they remain focused on truly early-career investigators and account for career breaks.

A significant portion of the meeting addressed the new **Late-Breaking Abstract Session**, where Council underscored the need for genuine late-breaking, unpublished work, and for diversity across topic, institution, geography, and presenter demographics. Two LBAs were confirmed, with the remaining two to be chosen using strengthened criteria via an email-based process (or a follow-up meeting if needed). Several items, including a plan for **JARO supplement pages**, were deferred to the January meeting.

Decisions Made (Consolidated)

- Proceed with current **Midwinter Meeting registration and budget plans**, including promotional campaigns highlighting sessions, social events, and early-bird deadlines.
- **Approved** pilot **Local Student/Postdoc Registration** program:
    - $25 per day, up to two days, for local, non-presenting students and postdocs with proof of residency.
    - Access to scientific and core networking sessions; badge indicators used to manage access.
    - Caps may be implemented by meeting as needed.
- **Initiate early search** for the next **JARO Editor-in-Chief** in collaboration with Springer and develop a **contingency interim editor** plan.

- **Approved** the **ARO Outreach Award Program** with three tiers (first, second, third place), each providing:
    - Free registration to the subsequent Midwinter Meeting.
    - Recognition at the awards ceremony and on the ARO website.
- Confirmed that initial Outreach Award focus will be on **school-age hearing health outreach**, using standardized slide decks, while allowing a variety of outreach settings.
- Agreed to explore potential **partnership with the Hearing Health Foundation** for Outreach Award support and potential scaling.
- **Deferred final approval** of **Awards Committee composition guidelines**, but agreed that revised guidelines must:
    - Strive for **gender balance** (or at least higher than 30% women, e.g., ≥40% of each gender).
    - Include at least **two non-US members**.
    - Maintain representation of audiologists, clinicians, and across key scientific domains.
- **Deferred approval** of the proposed **pre-faculty/trainee excellence award** pending rework, and agreed that:
    - **Young Investigator Award** criteria should be updated to maintain an early-career focus and explicitly account for **career breaks**.
- **Accepted** the **top two Late-Breaking Abstracts** for the 2025 LBA Session.
- Agreed on criteria and process to select the remaining **two LBA talks**, emphasizing:
    - Unpublished work not available by the regular abstract deadline.
    - Topic and presenter diversity (including vestibular/central, international representation, and gender balance).
    - Avoiding dominance by a single lab or institution.
- Agreed that future LBA submissions must include a **brief justification** of why they are late-breaking and meet the "unpublished/not available by Sept 15" standard.
- **Deferred** discussion of **JARO supplement pages** and other non-urgent items to the **January Council meeting**.

Action Items (Consolidated)

- **Kristin Johnson**
    - Move outstanding committee reports to the **January or Midwinter Meeting agendas**.

    - Lead Midwinter communications: finalize and send registration reminders and highlight sessions, social events, and early-bird deadlines.
    - Implement the **Local Student/Postdoc Registration** category (pricing, eligibility checks, badge indicators, and potential caps) with registration and IT teams.
    - Coordinate with venue and catering staff to adjust coffee and refreshments as needed and ensure ID checks at events serving alcohol.
    - Continue working with **Springer** on the **JARO Editor-in-Chief search** process; draft and prepare to release a call for applications/nominations around the Midwinter Meeting.
    - Consult with Council leadership about potential interim JARO editor candidates.
    - Work with web/communications staff to create the **ARO Outreach/Community Engagement webpage** and integrate Outreach Award recognition.
    - Compile Council feedback on **Awards Committee composition** and the **early-career/pre-faculty and Young Investigator awards**, share with Alain for review, and then send consolidated feedback to the Awards Committee co-chairs.
    - Email Council summarizing the **LBA selection criteria and process**, collect members' **top two** LBA recommendations, and coordinate with the Program Committee to finalize the four talks (or proceed with the January 7 meeting if needed).
    - Add deferred items, including **JARO supplement pages**, to the **January Council agenda**.
- **Mike Bowl**
    - Lead completion of **school-age slide decks** on hearing health and noise-induced hearing loss for elementary and junior-high audiences.
    - Develop **Outreach Award selection criteria** and an application/nomination process (including documentation such as narratives, photos with permission, and quotes/testimonials where possible).
    - Coordinate with **SPARO** to promote outreach activities and encourage participation.
    - Prepare an **annual report** for Council summarizing outreach activities, reach, and award outcomes.
- **Awards Committee Co-Chairs & Alain Dabdoub**

    - Revise the **Awards Committee composition guidelines** to reflect Council's expectations for gender balance, international representation, and expertise coverage.
    - Rework and clarify the proposed **pre-faculty/trainee award** and **Young Investigator Award criteria**, including explicit consideration of **career breaks** and a clear focus on early-career stages.
    - Bring revised proposals to Council for further review and approval.
- **Kayla Hill & Program Committee Leadership (Jeff Holt, Sonia Pyott, et al.)**
    - Update **Late-Breaking Abstract submission guidelines and forms** to:
        - Require a **~100-word late-breaking justification**.
        - Explicitly state that submissions must be **unpublished** and not available by the regular abstract deadline (Sept 15).
    - Use Council's guidance around diversity and late-breaking criteria when finalizing the **2025 LBA session**.
- **Council Members (Collectively)**
    - Review LBA submissions and send **two recommended abstracts** for the remaining late-breaking slots to Kristin, using the agreed criteria.