ARO Council Meeting

Date: April 15, 2026

Attendees: Kristin Johnson, Alain Dabdoub, Amanda Lauer, Avril Genene Holt, Lisa Cunningham, Katharine Fernandez, Ronna Hertzano, Konstantina Stankovic, Mike Bowl, Shelby Payne, Sunil Puria, Sonja Pyott, Lavinia Sheets

1. Updates from the Executive Office

Summary

Kristin Johnson opened the meeting with updates on behalf of the Executive Office. All submission deadlines for the year - including awards, travel awards, and review timelines - have been finalized with the committee chairs, providing a comprehensive picture of deadlines for the full year. The symposium special session submission is scheduled to open on April 22, with Sonya Pyott and the Program Committee currently reviewing submission guidelines to confirm no updates are needed. All deadlines will be posted to the ARO website by the following week.

Kristin Johnson reported that most committees have either already met or will begin meeting this month. The only committee not yet scheduled is Long Range Planning, for which a scheduling poll was being distributed the same day. Once all committees have convened, the Executive Office plans to begin scheduling committee chairs to attend future Council meetings, ideally starting next month.

Kristin Johnson noted that the Executive Office met with Springer earlier the same day regarding JARO. The Editor-in-Chief application and call have been posted on social media, included in the newsletter, and are live on the website. Springer agreed to add the call to their journal website and subscriber emails to assist in broadening the applicant pool.

Decisions Made

- No formal decisions were made during this portion of the meeting.

Action Items

- **Kristin Johnson/Executive Office:** Post all submission deadlines and guidelines to the ARO website by the following week.
- **Sonya Pyott/Program Committee:** Review and confirm symposium special session submission guidelines ahead of the April 22 opening.

- **Kristin Johnson/Executive Office:** Distribute the scheduling poll for the Long Range Planning Committee.

2. JARO Updates: Editor-in-Chief Contract and Continuous Publishing

Summary

Kristin Johnson transitioned to JARO-related updates. Regarding the Editor-in-Chief search, Springer has offered assistance in reviewing applications; however, Kristin Johnson cautioned that Springer's interests are not always aligned with those of the association and recommended that the Council retain control over the selection process. Council agreed with this approach.

Kristin Johnson reminded the Council that the current editor, Dr. Christopher Cederroth, had previously notified ARO leadership that his professional situation was changing and that he intended to step down. A formal call for a new Editor-in-Chief was opened at his request. However, it was reported in a meeting the previous day that Dr. Cederroth indicated he may wish to reapply. Kristin Johnson communicated to him that, given the open call, he would need to formally reapply. Council concurred with this position.

Regarding the editor contract, Kristin Johnson noted that the agreement technically expires on April 21, 2027, and that a written notice of non-renewal must be issued this week to comply with the contract's 12-month notice requirement. Council agreed to issue the notice as a formality while inviting Dr. Cederroth to reapply if he wishes to continue in the role. Lisa Cunningham and Ronna Hertzano, who were both present for the earlier Springer call, provided additional context. Johnson also noted that the previous Editor-in-Chief search took several years, and that Dr. Matt Kelly has expressed willingness to serve in an interim capacity, though it remains uncertain whether he would be willing to fill a prolonged gap without compensation, as he cannot accept payment for the role.

Kristin Johnson then introduced a proposal from Springer to move JARO to a continuous publishing model, under which articles would be published immediately upon acceptance rather than being held for traditional issues. Springer indicated this is a common mechanism for journals of JARO's size. Council members raised questions about how special collections and the table of contents would function under the new model. The Springer team confirmed that collections would still be supported and that electronic tables of contents would continue to be distributed to members. Ronna Hertzano and Lisa Cunningham motioned and seconded a vote. Council approved the move to continuous publication by a vote of 10 in favor with no objections.

Decisions Made

- Council agreed that ARO should retain control over the Editor-in-Chief selection process, with Springer serving in an advisory capacity only.
- Council agreed to issue a formal non-renewal notice to Dr. Christopher Cederroth as required by contract, while inviting him to reapply through the open call.
- Council approved by majority vote (10 in favor) the transition of JARO to a continuous publication model.

Action Items

- **Kristin Johnson/Executive Office:** Issue the formal non-renewal notice to Dr. Christopher Cederroth.
- **All Council Members:** Personally encourage and invite strong candidates to apply for the JARO Editor-in-Chief position.

3. 2026 MidWinter Meeting Executive Summary Overview

Summary

Kristin Johnson shared the 2026 MidWinter Meeting Executive Summary with the Council. She initially attempted to share the document via a link in the meeting chat; however, permissions issues - likely related to NIH network restrictions - prevented some members from accessing it. She will email the document directly to all Council members. She noted that the full financial reconciliation is still ongoing.

Financial Performance

Kristin Johnson reported that the 2026 MidWinter Meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico, resulted in an approximately $80,000 loss to the organization. Attendance was roughly 200 registrants below projections (1,503 total). Kristin Johnson noted that all organizational metrics had indicated attendance would exceed historical levels, but changes at the federal level - including heightened concerns over US federal policy and changing immigration enforcement - contributed to the shortfall. Cost-mitigating strategies helped but were insufficient to overcome the attendance deficit. Several pieces of the financial reconciliation remain outstanding, including rebates from the Sheridan and reimbursements under an agreement with Discover Puerto Rico for local vendor payments. Kristin Johnson characterized the loss as "not devastating" for the organization and better than initial projections.

Survey Response Rate

The attendee survey achieved a response rate of 40.78%, the highest on record, surpassing the previous best of 37.3% in 2023. A total of 613 respondents participated. Approximately 88.6% of respondents were current ARO members, and 112 first-time attendees were identified.

Registration and Membership Trends

Kristin Johnson presented a breakdown of registrants by membership type, noting that student member registration has declined while non-member registration has remained relatively stable. Several PIs reported during the meeting in Puerto Rico that they could not afford to bring students, a trend the Council expects to continue amid ongoing funding pressures. Financial burden and infrequent attendance were cited as the most common reasons non-members gave for not joining. The largest drop in registration by country came from the United States, though it is unclear how much of this was driven by visa or immigration-related travel concerns.

Meeting Logistics Ratings

Childcare arrangement ratings declined, which Kristin Johnson attributed to more attendees bringing children without dedicated support infrastructure in place. Captioning ratings improved significantly, reflecting the AV team's efforts. Food availability ratings increased notably compared to previous years. The mobile app received a slightly improved rating but remains a persistent source of negative feedback. Airport accessibility and the awards reception received high marks.

Meeting Schedule and Format

A new survey question asked whether ARO should move the meeting to a weekday schedule (Sunday-Thursday or Monday-Friday). Respondents largely preferred the traditional Saturday-through-Wednesday format. Session formats including Poster Blitz, Mini-Podiums, and Special Sessions were generally well received. The late-breaking session was positively reviewed by those who attended, though attendance was lower than for other formats.

Mobile App

The Council discussed the ongoing dissatisfaction with the meeting mobile app at length. Kristin Johnson explained that the current app is built into the Joyn system, making it inexpensive ($3,000-$4,000) and operationally simple since abstracts pull directly from the system. However, the developer has released a new version of their platform at a significantly higher cost and has shown no interest in improving the legacy version. Lavinia Sheets recommended an alternative app, Whova, which Kristin Johnson had evaluated and found to be high quality but considerably more expensive ($7,000-$10,000). She expressed that it

would be an "aggressive goal" to secure a new app in time for the 50th anniversary meeting in San Francisco, acknowledging that San Francisco will already be an expensive meeting due to the union property status of the venue. Council was supportive of budgeting for a new app. Kristin Johnson also noted that Parthenon is developing Pillar, a new association management software intended to replace Joyn, which would include a new app component, though this transition has been delayed repeatedly.

Free-Form Comment Analysis

Kristin Johnson presented an AI-assisted analysis of attendee free-form comments. Key themes included: late-breaking sessions sometimes felt forced rather than truly novel; overlapping sessions remain a perennial concern; poster grouping in the poster session is challenging due to high volumes of last-minute changes and withdrawals; and attendance risk is driven by structural factors - cost, international travel barriers, and scheduling density - rather than scientific interest. There is increasing demand for structured networking opportunities. Feedback also highlighted a lack of clarity around spARO, suggesting that an information campaign could address these issues. Short courses and year-round education emerged as areas of high interest, with particular demand for NIH/NIDCD-focused content, grant writing, data analysis, and career paths outside academia.

Future Meetings

Free-form comments included extensive positive remarks about Puerto Rico as a meeting location. The Executive Office has reached out to the convention center regarding future Puerto Rico dates. Bri Garza sent a reminder the previous day to follow up on the proposal, which has been outstanding for approximately four weeks. The Executive Summary document will be distributed to all committee chairs, who have also been asked to provide feedback via the strategic initiative form by June 1.

Decisions Made

- No formal decisions were made during this portion of the meeting.

Action Items

- **Kristin Johnson/Executive Office:** Email the full Executive Summary document to all Council members.
- **Kristin Johnson/Executive Office:** Explore and budget for a new meeting app (such as Whova) for future meetings, with an aggressive goal of the 50th anniversary meeting in San Francisco.

- **Kristin Johnson/Executive Office:** Finalize financial reconciliation, including outstanding rebates from the Sheridan and Discover Puerto Rico.
- **Kristin Johnson/Executive Office:** Continue follow-up with the Puerto Rico convention center to obtain a proposal for future meeting dates.

4. Update on Strategic Themes

Summary

Kristin Johnson reported that she and Lisa Cunningham sent a communication to all committees asking them to discuss strategic themes with their respective groups. Additionally, the Long Range Planning Committee and the Communications Committee received a specific request to collaborate on drafting a survey to address the questions Council has been discussing related to the strategic themes. Mike Bowl acknowledged receipt of this request.

Decisions Made

- No formal decisions were made during this portion of the meeting.

Action Items

- **Mike Bowl/Long Range Planning and Communications Committees:** Collaborate to determine survey ownership and draft a survey regarding strategic themes.

5. Late Breaking Submissions and Review Process

Summary

Kristin Johnson raised the topic of late-breaking submissions and the review process, using the remaining meeting time to provide an overview for Sonja Pyott, who will be involved in future reviews. Council members recalled from previous discussions that the primary gaps in the review process included: the need for submitters to clearly explain why their submission qualifies as "late-breaking"; the need for clearer review criteria overall; and the challenge of ensuring diversity across labs, institutions, and geographic regions when assembling podium sessions from late-breaking submissions - a consideration that the Program Committee normally manages but finds more difficult in this context. Lisa Cunningham expressed support for having the Program Committee evaluate the late-breaking submissions going forward. Sonja Pyott, Program Committee chair, is supportive of this approach as well. Kristin Johnson reminded the Council that the deadline to make changes to Program Committee workload and processes is June 9.

Decisions Made

- No formal decisions were made during this portion of the meeting.

Action Items

- **Sonja Pyott/Program Committee:** Update the late-breaking submission and review criteria to address identified gaps, including requiring a justification for late-breaking status and clearer evaluation standards. Deadline: June 9.

6. Memorial Sessions

Summary

In the final minutes of the meeting, the Council discussed growing space constraints in the meeting program and the challenge posed by memorial (In Memoriam) sessions, which have at times run significantly over their scheduled duration. Kristin Johnson noted that many peer organizations handle memorial sessions virtually, allowing colleagues to assemble tribute content year-round rather than during the annual meeting. Recorded sessions could be maintained as an archive on the ARO website. This approach would free meeting space, avoid competing with other events, and reduce attendee fatigue. She noted that exceptions would be made for particularly significant honorees, such as Award of Merit recipients. Council was broadly supportive of exploring a virtual option as well options to shorten the sessions to 1-hour and to hold them over the lunch hour, though Kristin Johnson indicated the final decision would rest with the Program Committee.

Decisions Made

- Council expressed general support for exploring a virtual In Memoriam format; no formal vote was taken.

Action Items

- **Program Committee:** Evaluate the feasibility of transitioning memorial sessions to a virtual "In Memoriam" archive on the ARO website versus shortening the format to 1-hour and/or holding them over the lunch hour at the in-person meeting.

Summary

The ARO Council convened on April 15, 2026, with thirteen members in attendance. The meeting covered a broad range of topics spanning journal operations, meeting evaluation, strategic planning, and program process improvement.

The Executive Office reported that all submission deadlines for the year have been finalized and will be posted to the website imminently, with symposium special session submissions opening on April 22. Most committees have begun or will begin meeting this month, and the scheduling poll for the Long Range Planning Committee was distributed.

A significant portion of the meeting was dedicated to JARO. Council agreed to issue a formal non-renewal notice to the current Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Christopher Cederroth, as required by the contract's 12-month notice provision, while simultaneously inviting him to reapply through the open call. Council also approved by majority vote (10 in favor, no objections) the transition of JARO from issue-based publishing to a continuous publication model, following a recommendation from Springer and supported by the JARO Board representatives. Council members were encouraged to personally invite strong candidates to apply for the editorship.

The Council reviewed the 2026 MidWinter Meeting Executive Summary. The San Juan meeting resulted in an approximately $80,000 loss due to an attendance shortfall of roughly 200 registrants, driven primarily by federal policy changes and associated travel concerns. The attendee survey achieved a record 40.78% response rate. Highlights included strong improvements in captioning and food availability ratings, high satisfaction with Puerto Rico as a location, and continued frustration with the mobile app. Student attendance continued to decline, attributed to PI funding constraints. Council discussed budgeting for a higher-quality meeting app, potentially Whova, with a target of implementation by the 50th anniversary meeting in San Francisco. The Executive Office is continuing to pursue a proposal from the Puerto Rico convention center for future dates.

Kristin Johnson and Cunningham reported that communications regarding strategic themes have been sent to all committees, and the Long Range Planning and Communications Committees have been asked to collaborate on a membership survey. The Council discussed improvements to the late-breaking submission and review process, identifying the need for clearer criteria, late-breaking justification requirements, and better diversity considerations, with a deadline of June 9 for process changes. Finally, the Council expressed support for exploring a virtual In Memoriam format to address space constraints in the meeting program.

Decisions Made (Consolidated)

- Council agreed that ARO should retain control over the Editor-in-Chief selection process, with Springer serving in an advisory capacity only.
- Council agreed to issue a formal non-renewal notice to Dr. Christopher Cederroth as required by contract, while inviting him to reapply through the open call.
- Council approved by majority vote (10 in favor) the transition of JARO to a continuous publication model.
- Council expressed general support for exploring a virtual In Memoriam format to free meeting program space or limiting this session type ro 1-hour and/or holding them in-person at the MWM over the lunch hour.

Action Items (Consolidated)

Kristin Johnson/Executive Office:

- Post all submission deadlines and guidelines to the ARO website by the following week.
- Distribute the scheduling poll for the Long Range Planning Committee.
- Issue the formal non-renewal notice to Dr. Christopher Cederroth this week.
- Email the full Executive Summary document to all Council members.
- Explore and budget for a new meeting app (such as Whova) for future meetings, with an aggressive goal of the 50th anniversary meeting in San Francisco.

Bri Garza/Executive Office:

- Continue follow-up with the Puerto Rico convention center to obtain a proposal for future meeting dates.
- Finalize financial reconciliation, including outstanding rebates from the Sheridan and Discover Puerto Rico.

Sonya Pyott/Program Committee:

- Review and confirm symposium special session submission guidelines ahead of the April 22 opening.
- Update the late-breaking submission form and review criteria to address identified gaps. Deadline: June 9.
- Evaluate the feasibility of transitioning memorial sessions to a virtual "In Memoriam" archive on the ARO website or limiting this session type to 1-hour and/or holding them over the lunch our at the in-person MWM.

Mike Bowl/Long Range Planning and Communications Committees:

- Collaborate to determine survey ownership and draft a survey regarding strategic themes.

Shelby Payne:

- Review spARO-specific data in the Executive Summary for detailed analysis.

All Council Members:

- Personally encourage and invite strong candidates to apply for the JARO Editor-in-Chief position.