ARO Development, Mentorship, and Advancement Committee Meeting

Date: Monday, May 18, 2026 | 1:00 - 1:52 PM EDT

1. Welcome

Summary

Committee Chair Melissa Marie McGovern opened the meeting. Members greeted one another and confirmed no formal regrets had been received in advance, though several invited members did not respond. Kristin Johnson shared the meeting agenda on screen and McGovern proceeded with the agenda.

Decisions Made

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

Action Items

- No action items.

2. ARO Council 2026-2029 Strategic Planning Cycle

Summary

McGovern led a discussion on the committee's response to the ARO Council 2026-2029 strategic planning cycle, which had been made available in the DMAC Google Drive since the prior meeting. McGovern noted that several task groups had already submitted written responses and that the goal of the May meeting was to gather any remaining input before McGovern compiled the full committee response for submission to Council.

McGovern reviewed the four Council strategic themes and opened discussion to the full group. The themes are: removing barriers to in-person MidWinter Meeting attendance, early career support, international engagement, and increasing clinician participation.

On early career support, Avril Holt offered input on how the ARO Scholars program addresses this theme. She noted that the program began with its first cohort and is now preparing for its fourth cohort. Across the first three cohorts, approximately twelve scholars have been supported, making the program a clear contributor to early career trajectory development in the field. She emphasized that the cohort model, in which scholars from different institutions develop a peer network while attending the MidWinter Meeting together, is a program strength.

On international engagement, the committee acknowledged meaningful limitations. Reza Amanipour noted that international scholars have applied in prior cycles, including applicants from South America and Africa, but that the program faces two primary barriers: the financial cost of international travel and the current difficulty of visa processing. Amanipour cited a specific instance in which a scholar from Colombia who was enrolled at the University of Kentucky was unable to obtain a visa in time for the

2025 MidWinter Meeting. Holt emphasized the importance of surfacing these limitations honestly in the response to Council, rather than overstating the committee's capacity in this area.

On clinician participation, the committee noted that the ARO Scholars program is currently focused on research scientists rather than clinicians, residents, or medical students, and that this is by design. Holt explained that the program's cohort model relies on shared experience and common research focus to build community among scholars. Expanding to clinical career tracks before establishing a sustainable funding base and larger cohort size would dilute the program's cohesion. Federal funding through an R25 grant application is being pursued to eventually support a broader expansion.

On attendance barriers, Johnson noted that other committees had raised questions about how meeting session recordings are used, including whether members who attend in person access recordings afterward and whether recording access is a meaningful offering for those who cannot attend due to visa or travel barriers. The committee briefly discussed these questions but did not reach a formal conclusion.

Johnson observed that not every task group will have a relevant response to every Council strategic priority and encouraged the committee not to generate responses where none genuinely apply.

Decisions Made

- The committee agreed to submit responses noting both contributions and limitations, particularly regarding international engagement, in the Council strategic planning response.

Action Items

- **McGovern:** Compile all task group strategic planning responses and submit the full committee response to Council.

3. Pre-ARO Virtual Session Task Group Update

Summary

Agudemu Borjigin, task group leader, provided an update. Borjigin explained that the Pre-ARO Virtual Session is typically planned closer to the MidWinter Meeting. The standard format involves reviewing the conference program, identifying special sessions beyond posters and podiums, and inviting session organizers to introduce their sessions to attendees in advance. Borjigin reported no major planning updates at this time given how far out the meeting is.

McGovern asked Borjigin to submit a brief written summary of how the Pre-ARO Virtual Session addresses the Council's strategic planning priorities, noting in particular that the session likely speaks to attendance barrier reduction. Borjigin agreed to provide that written feedback.

Decisions Made

- None

Action Items

- **Agudemu Borjigin:** Provide written feedback to McGovern describing how the Pre-ARO Virtual Session addresses the ARO Council strategic planning priorities, particularly around reducing barriers to in-person meeting attendance.

4. Special Sessions Task Group Update

Summary

Task group leader Jarnail Singh was not present. McGovern reported that Singh had communicated in advance that the task group is planning to submit a special session for the 2027 MidWinter Meeting highlighting the contributions of Asian scientists in the field. McGovern explained that this proposal follows the prior year pattern of spotlighting underrepresented scientific communities, building on the Black scientists session and the Hispanic and Latine scientists session.

The committee discussed the proposed session's theme and submission process. The consensus was that the session should have a strong scientific theme rather than centering solely on demographic identity, consistent with Program Committee guidance from prior years. The pattern from the Latin scientists session, which used a circuits and cortex framing, was cited as a model.

Avril Genene Holt, who had submitted a special session from outside this committee in the prior cycle, described the submission process: one person initiates the proposal in the submission system, enters the overall session abstract and description, and then the system emails each committed speaker requesting that they upload their own individual abstract. Speakers must upload their abstracts before the submission can be finalized. The Program Committee expects best-effort complete information at the time of submission but will permit changes to the speaker list afterward.

Kristin Johnson confirmed that the symposia and special session submission deadline is June 22 and that Johnson had created a new Google Drive folder under the DMAC 2026-2027 directory for Symposia and Special Sessions, uploading prior submissions from 2024, 2025, and 2026 as reference materials. The next committee meeting is June 15, which is one week before the deadline. McGovern and the group agreed that Singh should begin circulating a draft proposal by email prior to the June 15 meeting to allow adequate time for committee review before submission. Singh, as task group leader, will execute the final submission.

Decisions Made

- The Special Sessions task group will pursue a session highlighting Asian scientists in the field of otolaryngology, with a scientific theme to be developed by the task group.
- The draft proposal will be circulated to the full committee by email before the June 15 meeting and finalized for submission by the June 22 deadline.

Action Items

- **Jarnail Singh / Special Sessions Task Group:** Develop the session proposal with a scientific theme, circulate a draft to the full committee via email before June 15, and submit the final proposal by the June 22 deadline.
- **Jarnail Singh:** Upload the draft proposal and any working documents to the DMAC 2026-2027 Symposia/Special Sessions Google Drive folder.

5. ARO Scholars Task Group Update

Summary

Reza Amanipour, task group leader, reported that the Burroughs Wellcome Fund (BWF) confirmed approval of a $20,000 grant approximately ten days prior to the meeting, following a proposal submitted roughly two months earlier. The grant will support four scholars with meeting expenses and stipend for the next cohort. Amanipour noted that the authorized signatories on the proposal are Lisa Cunningham and Kristin Johnson.

Regarding the Hearing Health Foundation (HHF), Amanipour provided a detailed update. The committee has submitted funding proposals to HHF in multiple prior years, including a January 22 submission from Jeff, a former DMAC co-chair, outlining three sponsorship tiers of $10,000, $15,000, and $20,000. In each of the past two years, HHF has contacted the committee before its internal deadline to communicate a change in the foundation's direction, resulting in the proposal never being formally reviewed. Amanipour reported that this year was no different. McGovern offered to reach out to her contacts at HHF, including Chris Geissler, to seek more clarity on the foundation's shifting priorities.

The committee discussed the ARO Scholars program's growth trajectory. Amanipour confirmed that approximately twenty to thirty applications are typically received for each cycle. The program is now preparing for its fourth cohort; with approximately four scholars per cohort across three completed cohorts, twelve scholars have been supported to date. When asked about expansion priorities, Amanipour indicated that the committee's preference is to expand the number of scholars in the program rather than increase the per-scholar stipend, which has been $2,500 for summer research and $2.500 for travel to the MidWInter Meeting.

On the R25 NIH grant application, Avril Genene Holt confirmed that a draft is complete and is currently undergoing internal review at the university. The application deadline is in September. Holt noted the R25 mechanism and that the grant, if funded, would provide more sustainable federal funding and support a gradual expansion of the program's eligibility to additional career levels over time. The committee agreed that expanding inclusivity by career level is a goal tied to federal funding success and not something that should be rushed given the current cohort model's reliance on shared experience and community building.

Decisions Made

- The committee's priority for ARO Scholars program growth is expanding the number of scholars supported rather than increasing the per-scholar stipend.
- McGovern will follow up with HHF contacts to seek clarity on the foundation's direction.

Action Items

- **Reza Amanipour:** Provide McGovern with data on scholar expenses and stipend breakdown for inclusion in the Council strategic planning response.
- **McGovern:** Follow up with Chris Geissler at the Hearing Health Foundation to discuss the foundation's shifting priorities and any future funding possibilities.
- **Avril Genene Holt:** Continue the drafting process for the R25 grant application ahead of the September deadline.

6. Manuscript Update

Summary

Carolyn McClaskey was not present for this agenda item. McGovern noted her absence and the manuscript update was not discussed. McClaskey joined the meeting later, near the end of the session, and was welcomed by the group.

Decisions Made

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

Action Items

- No action items. Manuscript update to be carried forward to the next meeting.

7. Job Search Mixer Task Group Update

Summary

No members of the Job Search Mixer task group were present at the time the agenda item came up. McGovern noted the mixer is a new initiative for the current cycle, replacing the virtual coffee hours and travel award second-round review that had been discontinued.

Kristin Johnson raised the question of how to secure the mixer's place in the 2027 MidWinter Meeting program. Johnson suggested that submitting the event as a special session through the Program Committee's formal submission process would be the most reliable way to guarantee a program slot, and offered to inform the Program Committee in advance about the nature of the event. Carolyn McClaskey arrived during this discussion and confirmed she would work with her subcommittee to develop a proposal. Johnson noted the June 22 submission deadline. McClaskey agreed to bring a draft proposal to the June 15 committee meeting and upload it to the Job Search Mixer folder in the DMAC

Google Drive in advance so committee members could review it. Johnson shared the Google Drive folder link in the meeting chat.

Decisions Made

- The Job Search Mixer will be submitted as a formal special session to the Program Committee by the June 22 deadline to secure a program slot for the 2027 MidWinter Meeting.

Action Items

- **Carolyn McClaskey / Job Search Mixer Task Group:** Develop a draft proposal for the Job Search Mixer, upload it to the DMAC Google Drive, and bring it to the June 15 committee meeting for group review prior to submission.
- **Kristin Johnson / Executive Office:** Provide the Program Committee with advance context on the nature of the Job Search Mixer submission.

8. Adjournment and Next Steps

Summary

McGovern thanked the committee for their participation and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:52 PM EDT. The next committee meeting is scheduled for Monday, June 15, 2026, at 1:00 PM EDT, one week prior to the June 22 symposia and special session submission deadline.

Decisions Made

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

Action Items

- No additional action items.

Summary

The ARO Development, Mentorship, and Advancement Committee convened for its May 2026 meeting under Chair Melissa Marie McGovern. The primary focus of the meeting was the ARO Council 2026-2029 strategic planning cycle, with the committee discussing how each task group's activities align with the Council's four strategic themes: removing barriers to MidWinter Meeting attendance, early career support, international engagement, and clinician participation.

The committee identified the ARO Scholars program as the clearest vehicle for early career support, noting that three cohorts have been completed and a fourth is in preparation. The committee was candid in acknowledging the program's limitations with respect to international engagement, citing financial barriers and current visa processing challenges as factors largely outside the committee's control. It was agreed that the Council response should surface these limitations transparently. The connection between clinician participation and the ARO Scholars program was noted as a future

aspiration tied to the success of the pending R25 federal grant application, which is undergoing internal university review ahead of a September deadline.

Reza Amanipour reported that the Burroughs Wellcome Fund confirmed a $20,000 grant to support the next cohort of four ARO Scholars. The Hearing Health Foundation again declined to review a funding proposal due to an internal change in direction, and McGovern committed to following up with HHF contacts directly. Agudemu Borjigin confirmed that Pre-ARO Virtual Session planning has not yet formally begun but agreed to provide written feedback on how the session addresses Council strategic priorities. The Special Sessions task group, in the absence of task group leader Jarnail Singh, discussed plans for a session highlighting Asian scientists, with a scientific theme to be developed and a full proposal due by June 22. The committee agreed to circulate drafts by email before the June 15 meeting. With no task group representatives initially present for the Job Search Mixer, Carolyn McClaskey agreed upon joining to develop a draft proposal for submission as a formal special session, also by June 22. The manuscript update was deferred due to McClaskey's absence during that agenda item.

Decisions Made (Consolidated)

- The committee's Council strategic planning response will acknowledge both contributions and limitations, including barriers to international engagement.
- The ARO Scholars program's expansion priority is increasing the number of scholars supported, not increasing per-scholar stipend.
- McGovern will follow up directly with Hearing Health Foundation contacts to seek clarity on funding availability.
- The Special Sessions task group will develop a session highlighting Asian scientists with a scientific theme; a draft will be circulated to the full committee before June 15.
- The Job Search Mixer will be submitted as a formal special session to the Program Committee by June 22.

Action Items (Consolidated)

Melissa Marie McGovern (Committee Chair)

- Compile all task group strategic planning responses and submit the full committee response to Council.
- Follow up with Chris Geissler at the Hearing Health Foundation regarding the foundation's shifting priorities and future funding possibilities.

Jarnail Singh / Special Sessions Task Group

- Develop the Asian scientists session proposal with a scientific theme with the task group.
- Upload the draft proposal to the DMAC 2026-2027 Symposia/Special Sessions Google Drive folder.
- Circulate the draft to the full committee by email before June 15.

- Submit the final proposal by the June 22 deadline.

Carolyn McClaskey / Job Search Mixer Task Group

- Develop a draft proposal with the task group for the Job Search Mixer and upload it to the DMAC Google Drive before the June 15 meeting.
- Submit the finalized proposal as a special session by the June 22 deadline.

Reza Amanipour / ARO Scholars Task Group

- Provide Melissa McGovern with data on scholar expenses and stipend breakdown for inclusion in the Council strategic planning response.

Avril Genene Holt

- Continue the drafting process for the R25 grant application ahead of the September submission deadline.

Agudemu Borjigin

- Provide Melissa McGovern with written feedback on how the Pre-ARO Virtual Session addresses the ARO Council strategic planning priorities.

Kristin Johnson / Executive Office

- Provide the Program Committee with advance context on the nature of the Job Search Mixer submission.