ARO Membership Committee Meeting

April 21, 2026 | 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM EDT

Attendees: Maria Chait (Co-Chair), Steven David (Co-Chair), Steven Eliades, Samson Jamesdaniel, Amel Bahloul, Hiroyuki Kato, Rose Rizzi, Jing Zheng, Kristin Johnson (Executive Office)

Apologies: Jen Krizman

1. Welcome and Introductions

Summary

Maria Chait opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. Attendees introduced themselves to the group.

Decisions Made:

- None

Action Items:

- None

2. Council Priorities Overview

Summary

Maria Chait summarized the four priorities that ARO Council has asked all committees to address in the current cycle: (1) understanding barriers to in-person meeting attendance and evaluating whether existing virtual offerings are sufficient; (2) supporting early career scientists and trainees; (3) increasing international engagement with ARO; and (4) increasing clinician participation. Kristin Johnson shared a link to the full Council priorities document in the meeting chat for members to reference.

Kristin Johnson clarified the intent of the exercise: committees are not being asked to speak on behalf of the full membership, but rather to share perspectives as experienced, engaged volunteers. The Long Range Planning Committee and the Communications Committee Chairs are drafting a survey to allow all members and recent non-members to provide insight in addition to the committee responses.

Decisions Made:

- None

Action Items:

- None

3. In-Person Meeting Attendance and Virtual/Hybrid Options

Summary

The committee discussed the approximately 200-person drop in in-person attendance at the recent Puerto Rico mid-winter meeting. Members attributed the decline primarily to U.S. visa and immigration concerns affecting international attendees and to funding constraints limiting student travel. The committee explored whether hybrid meeting formats or expanded virtual offerings could help address these barriers.

Kristin Johnson noted that a fully hybrid meeting with seamless virtual attendance infrastructure would cost approximately $30,000 to $40,000, which Council considers prohibitive unless there is clear demonstrated demand. The current post-meeting option - session recordings available for individual purchase at $200, accessible for 30 days - was purchased by approximately 25 individuals this year. Committee members acknowledged this figure may undercount actual viewership, as labs frequently share a single login. Nevertheless, the committee broadly agreed that hybrid or expanded virtual formats risk discouraging in-person attendance, which is viewed as essential to ARO's scientific mission given the informal exchange and networking that cannot be replicated virtually. The particular challenges of virtual participation across time zones were noted, with members in Europe and Asia often facing late-night start times.

Kristin Johnson provided an overview of existing virtual content across ARO committees, including the Education Committee's seminar series (the most successful by both live attendance and YouTube viewership, with the most recent installment reaching approximately 100 in-person attendees), an Advanced Techniques Series, and various committee coffee hours with topic-dependent engagement.

Regarding upcoming meeting locations, Kristin Johnson shared the current roadmap: 2027 - San Francisco; 2028 - New Orleans; 2029 - TBD, with a potential return to Puerto Rico; 2030 - San Francisco. She explained that site selection is constrained by ARO's large footprint, high food and beverage minimums, that warmer locations without weather related travel risks are at peak season and pricing in February when the meeting is held, and that leadership is exploring a possible three-location rotation to serve geographically diverse members while managing costs.

Decisions Made:

- None.

Action Items:

- None

4. Clinician Participation

Summary

The committee discussed ongoing efforts to increase clinician engagement with ARO. Reference was made to prior correspondence from clinician member Jason Brandt and Past President Ronna Hertzano

regarding clinician participation strategies - correspondence that had been housed in a former staff inbox and had been difficult to locate. A committee member found and shared the email with Kristin Johnson during the meeting. Key suggestions contained in that correspondence included ARO sponsoring clinicians to attend the mid-winter meeting and/or inviting presentations from clinician-focused meetings such as COSM (Combined Otolaryngology Spring Meetings).

Committee members observed that ARO can feel like "too complicated a commitment" for many clinicians relative to dedicated clinical meetings, and that this perception poses a structural barrier to engagement. It was noted that ARO's Clinician Scientists Committee is already engaged on this issue at a deeper level. Steven Eliades indicated he would be attending COSM later in the week and offered to connect with Jason Brandt directly to gather input on ARO participation.

Decisions Made:

- None

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson/Executive Office: Forward the clinician engagement email (shared during the meeting by a committee member) to all Membership Committee members.
- Steven Eliades: Connect with Jason Brandt at COSM regarding strategies to increase clinician participation in ARO and report findings back to the committee.

5. International Engagement and Committee Diversity

Summary

The committee engaged in substantive discussion about the underrepresentation of international voices both within ARO's broader membership activities and on the Membership Committee itself. Maria Chait noted that while she and Amel provide European representation, the committee currently lacks members from Asia, the Middle East, Australia, and Africa. Members acknowledged that the current U.S. geopolitical and visa climate presents significant barriers for international colleagues, including travel costs, time zone challenges for virtual events, and uncertainty about U.S. entry. Several members noted that maintaining active international relationships and communication channels during this period is itself a meaningful goal, even where travel is not feasible.

Kristin Johnson noted that related efforts are underway across ARO, including work in the Nominating Committee to ensure international members are actively considered for leadership positions and in the Awards Committee to better educate members that international scientists can only be recognized if they are nominated - a process that requires deliberate outreach to membership.

The committee agreed that waiting for the next formal volunteer appointment cycle is unnecessary. New members can be added with the approval of the President-Elect, and the committee resolved to begin outreach immediately. Members were asked to consider colleagues from underrepresented regions who are current ARO members and willing to serve. Kristin Johnson offered to raise the matter with the ARO Presidents (President, Past President, and President-Elect) at a meeting scheduled for the

following day, and to ask Council whether active international members are on their radar for potential committee appointment.

Decisions Made:

- The committee agreed to pursue immediate recruitment of new international members from underrepresented regions - particularly Asia, the Middle East, Australia, and Africa - rather than waiting for the next volunteer appointment cycle, in order to more fully represent the global ARO community.

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson/Executive Office: Raise the committee's request for international member recommendations with ARO leadership at the Presidents meeting on April 22, 2026.
- Kristin Johnson/Executive Office: Send a follow-up update email to the committee following the Presidents meeting.
- All Committee Members: Identify international colleagues who are current ARO members and willing to serve on the Membership Committee; submit suggestions via email to Maria Chait, Steven David, and Kristin Johnson.

6. Member Benefits and Website Update

Summary

A committee member inquired about the status of previously requested updates to the ARO website and membership directory. Kristin Johnson confirmed that the website has undergone significant updates since the committee's prior review and that many outstanding items have been addressed. However, she acknowledged she could not confirm precisely which changes were membership committee-specific, as the website has seen broad updates across multiple workstreams. She further noted that modifications to the membership directory are particularly complex, as additional fields must be hard-coded into the back end of ARO's association management system.

Kristin Johnson encouraged the committee to review the current website and member benefits page and report back any content that requires further attention, including language corrections, missing directory fields, or outdated information.

Decisions Made:

- None

Action Items:

- All Committee Members: Review the ARO website and member benefits page and report any remaining needed changes to Kristin Johnson/Executive Office prior to the next meeting.

7. Free Membership for First-Time Member Trainees

Summary

A committee member raised the outstanding status of the previously submitted proposal for free membership for first-time joiners, noting the proposal had been submitted to Council in a prior term. Kristin Johnson acknowledged she had not yet been fully briefed on where this matter stands and committed to reviewing both Membership Committee and Council meeting minutes to reconstruct the timeline and determine whether Council had formally acted on the proposal or requested additional information.

Decisions Made:

- None

Action Items:

- Kristin Johnson/Executive Office: Review Membership Committee and Council meeting minutes to determine the current status of the free membership for first-time joiners proposal and report back to the committee.

Summary

The April 21, 2026 ARO Membership Committee meeting was the first convening of the committee following the mid-winter meeting in Puerto Rico and included a welcome for one new member, Jane Chen. The meeting was organized around the four priorities Council has asked all committees to address: barriers to in-person attendance, early career support, international engagement, and clinician participation.

Discussion of in-person attendance and virtual programming was wide-ranging, with the committee agreeing that while hybrid and expanded virtual formats have merit as a concept, the cost ($30,000-$40,000) and the risk of further discouraging in-person attendance make them difficult to justify without stronger evidence of member demand. ARO's existing virtual content - particularly the Education Committee seminar series - was recognized as a meaningful and relatively cost-effective complement to the in-person meeting.

On clinician participation, the committee surfaced prior correspondence from Jason Brandt with actionable suggestions, and Steven Eliotis's timely attendance at COSM presented an opportunity to gather current perspectives directly.

The most substantive action of the meeting arose from the international engagement discussion. The committee reached agreement that immediate, targeted recruitment of international members to serve on the committee itself - particularly from Asia, the Middle East, Australia, and Africa - should proceed without delay, rather than waiting for the next formal cycle. Kristin Johnson committed to surfacing this request with Council leadership the following day and to sending a follow-up communication to the committee.

Administrative carry-over items - the free membership for first-time joiners proposal and the website update status - were flagged for research and follow-up by Kristin Johnson ahead of the next meeting.

Decisions Made (Consolidated)

- The Membership Committee agreed to pursue immediate recruitment of new international members from underrepresented regions rather than waiting for the next formal volunteer appointment cycle.

Action Items (Consolidated)

Kristin Johnson/Executive Office

- Forward the clinician engagement email to all Membership Committee members.
- Raise the committee's request for international member recommendations with ARO leadership at the Presidents meeting (April 22, 2026).
- Review Membership Committee and Council meeting minutes to determine the current status of the free membership for first-time joiners proposal and report back to the committee.

Steven Eliades

- Connect with Jason Brandt at COSM regarding strategies to increase clinician participation in ARO; report findings back to the committee.

All Committee Members

- Identify international ARO member colleagues from underrepresented regions who might be willing to serve on the committee; submit suggestions via email to Maria Chait and Steven David.
- Review the ARO website and member benefits page; report any remaining needed updates to the Executive Office prior to the next meeting.