ARO Education Committee Meeting

Tuesday, June 9, 2026 | 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM ET

Attendees: Kristin Johnson, Yea Won (Cathy) Sung, Kirupa Suthakar, Jarnail Singh, Sumana Ghosh, Sunil Puria, Pankaj Bhatia, Tong Shan, Ruili Xie, Takushi Miyoshi, Bryce Hambach

Apologies: None recorded

Unexcused: None recorded

Minutes

Discussion Topic 1: Initiative Task Survey

The committee opened with a review of the initiative task survey that had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting. More than 12 members had already submitted responses, selecting which initiatives or task groups they wished to join. Members who had not yet responded were encouraged to do so, and those who did not wish to participate in any task group were asked to indicate that as well, so that leaders could finalize active membership lists for each initiative. An administrative gap was identified: the current initiative spreadsheet contained email addresses without corresponding member names for several respondents. During the meeting, Kristin Johnson updated the survey in real time to require first and last name fields and shared the revised link in the meeting chat. Kristin Johnson also committed to cross-referencing unidentified email addresses against member profiles to supply the committee with a complete, named participant list. The committee agreed to allow approximately one to two weeks for remaining survey responses before finalizing task group assignments.

Decisions Made:

- The initiative task survey was updated to capture first and last name in addition to email, to facilitate member identification.
- The committee agreed to finalize active task group lists within approximately one to two weeks.

Discussion Topic 2: ARO Seminar Series

Cathy Sung provided an update on behalf of the seminar series subgroup (Kirupa Suthakar, Peter Santa Maria, Mahesh K Nayak, and Pankaj Bhatia). The current Auditory Nerve seminar series, which began in April, was on track to conclude in June. The Inner Ear Function series was confirmed to begin August 26. Three speakers had been confirmed: Dr. Jonathan Ashmore (August 26), Dr. Jung Hoon Nam (date to be confirmed), and Dr. Gregory Frolenkov (December, due to teaching conflicts that precluded an earlier slot). Dr. Jonathan Bird had not yet been formally invited; Pankaj Bhatia was serving as the point of contact for that outreach.

Cathy Sung noted that Dr. Frolenkov's December placement created five scheduling slots in the series rather than the typical four, leaving open windows in October and November. Sunil Puria raised the observation that all confirmed speakers were male and suggested the committee consider adding a female speaker. The committee discussed three approaches: proceeding with outreach to Dr. Bird first and addressing a female candidate for any remaining slot; reaching out to a known female candidate first; or placing Dr. Bird's outreach on hold for two to three weeks while a female candidate was identified and invited, so that her participation would not appear to be an afterthought. The committee expressed clear preference for the third approach. It was noted that topic diversity was a secondary consideration – Dr. Frolenkov, Dr. Bird, and a potential candidate referred to as “Angela” all work in the area of hair bundle mechanics.

Pankaj Bhatia confirmed he would pause his outreach to Dr. Bird. Cathy Sung agreed to compile the committee's existing list of female candidate speakers, add additional names that had been contributed to the nominations sheet during the meeting, and distribute the list to subcommittee members for review and selection. Once a female candidate was identified and a slot confirmed, Dr. Bird would be contacted with the remaining available date.

Decisions Made:

- The committee agreed to prioritize identifying and inviting a qualified female speaker for the Inner Ear Function series before finalizing the invitation to Dr. Jonathan Bird, in the interest of gender diversity.
- Outreach to Dr. Jonathan Bird was placed on hold pending identification and confirmation of a female speaker.
- The Inner Ear Function series will expand to five seminars to fill the full August-through-December scheduling window.

Discussion Topic 3: Nomination Forms and Website Surveys

The committee reviewed the two speaker/panelist nomination forms recently launched on the ARO website: one for Seminar Series Speakers and one for Cutting Edge Techniques sessions. Both forms are located under the "Get Involved" section of the website on their respective initiative pages. Links to the forms had been included in the member newsletter distributed the prior weekend, with additional promotion via social media and future member emails still forthcoming.

The committee reviewed the forms live during the meeting. Discussion focused on ensuring the forms supported anonymous nominations as originally intended. Cathy Sung noted that the Seminar Series form had been designed with optional "About You" fields. However, the Cutting Edge Techniques form required an email address to advance to the next screen, which was inconsistent with that goal. The committee agreed that name and email fields should be optional on both forms. Kristin Johnson confirmed the changes could be made and committed to updating the Cutting Edge Techniques form accordingly. A suggestion was raised that the title of the survey entry as displayed in the newsletter – described as "ARO Community Survey" – was easy to overlook, and that more action-oriented language such as "Nominate a Speaker" might improve response rates.

Decisions Made:

- The committee agreed that contact information fields (name and email) on both nomination forms should be made optional to allow for anonymous submissions.

Discussion Topic 4: Coffee Hour Sessions

Jarnail Singh invited Sumana Ghosh to provide the Coffee Hour update. Sumana reported that the most recent coffee hour was held on April 22 and addressed the topic of science policy advocacy. The subgroup had previously been asked to space out events to avoid over-scheduling alongside the seminar series and other education committee programming; as a result, the next coffee hour is planned for the fall semester. A second participant had also expressed interest in joining the coffee hour team, which was welcomed.

The committee discussed Sumana Ghosh potentially taking on a broader organizational role for the coffee hours – managing logistics, recruiting moderators from among committee members, and offering speakers the option to moderate their own sessions. Sumana expressed willingness to take on this role but noted a scheduling constraint: new responsibilities in the fall semester, including possible Wednesday commitments, may prevent her from attending coffee hour planning meetings scheduled on Wednesdays between 12:00 and 1:00 PM. The committee discussed moving coffee hour sessions or planning meetings to a different day of the week to accommodate her availability, which Sumana indicated would be workable.

Decisions Made:

- Coffee hours will be spaced out through the fall semester to avoid over-programming alongside other Education Committee events.
- The committee agreed to explore scheduling coffee hour sessions on a day other than Tuesday to accommodate team member availability.
- Sumana Ghosh will take on an organizational role for the coffee hour series, with session moderation distributed among committee members and/or session speakers.

Discussion Topic 5: Cutting Edge Techniques

Tong Shan provided an update on the Cutting Edge Techniques initiative. The committee had recently sent out a nomination survey to solicit topic and speaker suggestions; Allison was thanked for her work assembling the survey. The next session will focus on Large Language Models (LLMs) in speech processing, with a target date in mid-August.

Two candidates had been contacted in advance of the meeting. Sam Mason provided a tentative "yes" but noted he would be on paternity leave around the planned timeframe; Tong Shan committed to following up with him in early August. Nima Mesgarani was unavailable due to a sabbatical. Tong Shan planned to reach out to Josh McDermott and Laura Williams as additional panelist candidates. The committee noted that a panel of three speakers would be acceptable for this session, particularly given Josh McDermott's seniority in the field. It was also confirmed that the previous Cutting Edge Techniques session on this topic area had featured Arthur (Artur Endicott), and that the same presenter would not be repeated.

Decisions Made:

- The next Cutting Edge Techniques session will focus on Large Language Models in speech processing, with a target date of mid-August.
- A panel of up to three speakers is considered acceptable for this session.

Discussion Topic 6: JARO Special Edition and Editor Search

The committee noted that the fourth initiative – a JARO (Journal of the Association for Research in Otolaryngology) Special Edition – remained on hold pending the appointment of a new editor-in-chief. Kristin Johnson confirmed that no applications had been received to date. Sunil Puria expressed concern at the lack of response, noting the position was accessible to a wide pool of candidates. Kristin Johnson encouraged all committee members to actively recruit qualified colleagues from their networks, noting that the position carries a healthy honorarium and requires ARO membership. The possibility that international candidates might face visa complications related to receiving the honorarium was raised and acknowledged as a potential barrier.

Kristin Johnson reported that the position had been posted on social media and on the publisher's website, and that the marketing team was in the process of creating a promotional flyer that would be distributed once complete. A suggestion was made to broadcast the opportunity to all ARO community members via a headquarters email to broaden awareness.

Decisions Made:

- The JARO Special Edition initiative remains on hold pending the appointment of a new editor-in-chief; no timeline can be committed to until a suitable candidate comes forward.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The June 9, 2026 ARO Education Committee meeting addressed the status of the committee's four ongoing initiatives and related administrative matters. The meeting reflected strong forward momentum on the seminar series and cutting edge techniques programming, with an important course-correction on speaker diversity, and surfaced continued concern over the stalled JARO editor search.

The most substantive discussion centered on the Inner Ear Function seminar series. With the Auditory Nerve series concluding in June and the Inner Ear Function series set to begin August 26, the committee noted a scheduling window of five slots through December. Recognizing that all confirmed speakers were male, the committee agreed to pause outreach to Dr. Jonathan Bird and instead prioritize identifying and inviting a qualified female speaker first, ensuring that any female inclusion reflected intentional recruitment rather than an afterthought. Cathy Sung committed to compiling candidate names and distributing them to the subcommittee for selection.

On the administrative front, the initiative task survey was updated during the meeting to capture full participant names, and Kristin Johnson committed to resolving the naming gap in the current respondent list. The two speaker nomination forms on the ARO website were reviewed and refined: the committee agreed that contact information should be optional on both to support anonymous submissions, and additional promotional outreach was confirmed to be forthcoming.

Coffee hours were confirmed to remain in an intentional pause until fall to avoid over-programming. Sumana Ghosh will take on a broader organizational role, with scheduling flexibility still to be worked out with the subgroup. For Cutting Edge Techniques, the next session will address Large Language Models in speech processing with a mid-August target; Tong Shan will continue panelist outreach. The JARO Editor Search remained a concern; with no applications received, committee members were strongly encouraged to recruit from their networks.

Action Items

1. Kristin Johnson/Executive Office: Cross-reference existing survey respondents' email addresses with member profiles and update the initiative spreadsheet with full participant names.
2. All Committee Members: Submit the initiative task survey if not yet done; indicate participation preference for each task group.
3. Cathy Sung/Seminar Series Subgroup: Compile a list of female candidate speakers for the Inner Ear Function series and distribute to subcommittee members for review and selection.
4. Pankaj Bhatia: Hold outreach to Dr. Jonathan Bird until the subcommittee identifies and contacts a female speaker candidate and communicates a decision.
5. Seminar Series Subgroup: Confirm speakers for the open October and November slots following receipt of candidate responses.
6. Kristin Johnson/Executive Office: Update the Cutting Edge Techniques nomination form to make name and email fields optional.

7. Executive Office/Marketing: Publish planned social media posts and follow-up email promotions for the nomination forms.
8. Jarnail Singh and Sumana Ghosh/Coffee Hour Subgroup: Coordinate to identify a topic, speaker, and scheduling approach for the next fall semester coffee hour; discuss day-of-week flexibility with the full coffee hour team.
9. Tong Shan/Cutting Edge Techniques Subgroup: Contact Josh McDermott and Laura Williams regarding participation as panelists in the LLM/speech processing session.
10. Tong Shan: Follow up with Sam Mason in early August to confirm his availability for the mid-August session date.
11. All Committee Members: Encourage qualified colleagues to apply for the JARO Editor-in-Chief position and circulate the opportunity within their professional networks.
12. Kristin Johnson/Executive Office: Distribute the JARO editor recruitment flyer to the committee and through ARO communications channels once complete; evaluate the feasibility of a broad headquarters email to the full ARO membership.