ARO Council Meeting

Date: Monday, June 15, 2026 | 1:00 EDT – 2:30 PM EDT

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

1. Grants Department Presentation

Summary

Nicole Greer, Director of Grants Management at Parthenon Management Group (PMG), presented an overview of PMG's grants support services. The Grants Department is equipped to assist ARO in identifying and pursuing federal funding opportunities through agencies including the CDC, NIH, and HRSA. Greer noted that PMG handles all administrative aspects of grant applications - including budgeting, compliance, and reporting - requiring only scientific and programmatic expertise from the client organization. Council members were invited to surface any upcoming programmatic initiatives that might align with available funding opportunities.

Decisions Made

- None.

Action Items

- None at this time.

2. Committee Chair Feedback: Strategic Planning Priorities

Summary

Kristin presented a synthesis of feedback gathered from ARO committee chairs as part of the ongoing strategic planning process. The feedback was organized around recurring themes that will inform the forthcoming membership survey.

Regarding **attendance barriers**, the same concerns surfaced consistently across all committees: cost, the current political climate, visa challenges, and federal funding uncertainty. Kristin noted that most of these barriers fall outside the organization's direct control.

On **virtual and recording options**, committees were broadly aligned in opposing a fully virtual meeting format, with particular note that the experience is unsatisfactory for international participants. The

current recordings-based model was viewed as an acceptable middle ground. One idea surfaced but not formally advanced was the option for speakers from high-attendance sessions to voluntarily redeliver their talks in a virtual format with live Q&A after the MidWinter Meeting, offering a more interactive experience than a static recording.

Regarding **international engagement**, the cost of travel and visa processing delays were identified as the primary barriers. The committees proposed "lab-level" pricing for meeting recordings and discussed protected allocations for international travel awards, with the caveat that merit-based selection criteria must be preserved to comply with R13 grant requirements.

On **clinical engagement**, Program Committee Chair Sonja Pyott noted that the committee actively works to integrate clinical and fundamental research across session programming. The fundamental challenge remains that clinical content can only be featured when it is submitted and nominated; the organization can encourage but cannot manufacture participation. Council agreed that outreach messaging should continue to emphasize the importance of submission and nomination from all member segments.

Decisions Made

- None formally recorded. Feedback will be incorporated into the strategic planning survey instrument.

Action Items

- None currently.

3. Membership Committee Scope and SpARO Mentoring Program

Summary

The Council reviewed the ongoing confusion surrounding the Membership Committee's role and scope. Council members observed that the committee's current charge, drawn from the now-expired strategic plan, assigns an overly broad range of responsibilities that has led to unclear prioritization. It was noted that the ARO website does not clearly articulate the Membership Committee's duties, and members agreed that each ARO committee should operate under a defined terms of reference to justify its existence and focus its work. Kristin Johnson confirmed that she would contact the committee chair to provide targeted guidance, narrowing the committee's charge to 2-3 foundational priorities.

The Council also addressed the spARO mentoring program, which has historically been overseen by trainees. Concerns were raised about continuity as trainee leadership turns over annually. Council agreed that transitioning program oversight to the Membership Committee and/or Parthenon staff would provide the organizational stability the program requires. Johnson will coordinate with Shelby and Michael Roberts to establish a formal support structure.

Decisions Made

- Council agreed to transition SpARO mentoring program oversight from trainees to the Membership Committee and/or Parthenon staff to ensure program continuity.

Action Items

- Kristin Johnson / Executive Office: Contact the Membership Committee chair to provide a clarified committee scope and 2-3 specific priority goals.
- Kristin Johnson / Executive Office: Coordinate with Shelby and Michael Roberts to formalize faculty and staff support for the SpARO mentoring program.

4. Awards Update and JARO Editor-in-Chief Search

Summary

Kristin Johnson provided an update on open award submissions, noting that the current cycle closes on July 15. Marketing is developing a dedicated web page and homepage banner to promote the open call for a new JARO Editor-in-Chief, with the goal of increasing the visibility of the search.

A Council member raised the question of junior-level recognition, noting that the Young Investigator Award (YIA) has historically been conferred at the associate professor level, leaving a gap for students and early-career trainees. The Council discussed the potential value of poster and talk recognition for these members. Before creating any new award category, Council agreed that the Awards Committee should first revisit the YIA's current eligibility criteria to determine whether the existing framework can be recalibrated to address the identified gap, rather than adding a new award in parallel.

Decisions Made

- Council agreed to defer creation of a new junior award pending the Awards Committee's review of Young Investigator Award eligibility criteria.

Action Items

- Kristin Johnson / Executive Office: Follow up with the Awards Committee to initiate a review of YIA eligibility criteria and evaluate junior award proposals.

5. Strategic Planning Survey Development

Summary

The Council received a status update on the development of the strategic planning membership survey. Council member Mike reported that survey questions have been drafted in coordination with Matt, Chair of the Long Range Planning Committee, focused on the thematic areas also explored with committee chairs. However, the group acknowledged that demographic questions must be incorporated at the outset; without demographic context, responses to questions about attendance barriers or programming needs cannot be meaningfully analyzed by member type - student, postdoc, PI, or clinician. This is expected to produce a longer survey than originally anticipated, and every effort will be made to streamline it.

Kristin noted that the original timeline called for a completed strategic plan by July, and while that deadline is unlikely to be met, the goal remains to stay as close to it as possible. Council debated the ideal survey window. Given that summer travel and academic schedules are already underway, members favored framing the survey as an urgent request with a compressed two-week response window rather than the originally proposed four weeks, in order to capture responses before members depart for the summer. A cover letter from Council leadership accompanying the survey was suggested to communicate its significance to the membership.

Decisions Made

- Council approved a two-week response window for the strategic planning survey, to be framed as an urgent request to membership.
- Council agreed to include a letter from Council leadership with the survey distribution to underscore its importance.

Action Items

- Mike and Matt: Incorporate demographic questions and committee chair feedback into the final survey instrument. Due: June 17, 2026.
- Kristin Johnson: Draft a Council leadership cover letter to accompany the strategic planning survey.

6. 50th Anniversary Celebration Planning and Meeting Budget

Summary

Council President Lisa opened discussion on plans to celebrate ARO's 50th anniversary at the 2027 Annual Meeting in San Francisco, with the aim of honoring the organization's history while projecting a forward-looking vision for its future. Given budgetary constraints, the Council focused on creative, low-cost ideas.

A photo banner installation was proposed, drawing on historical ARO photographs housed in David Lim's personal archives. The concept envisions a banner spanning the poster hall with sufficient spacing for attendees to annotate memories via sticky notes or written responses. A retrospective highlighting the 50 highest-cited papers published in JARO was well received as a means of celebrating the journal's legacy with minimal staff burden. A commemorative social event - potentially a "toast" or a 70s-themed "Hairball" - was also discussed, along with a branded step-and-repeat photo station with props. Johnson noted that Marketing is already developing commemorative swag items including an enamel pin, sticker, and small branded accessories.

Kristin provided a brief budget overview, noting that food and beverage costs for the San Francisco meeting are projected at approximately $300,000 - a significant increase over Puerto Rico's approximately $200,000 - despite bare-bones catering planning. Council acknowledged that the meeting is currently projecting a deficit and agreed that any anniversary programming must be incorporated without materially adding to costs. Industry revenue is being targeted as the primary mitigation strategy, and Kristin will finalize the meeting budget with industry-level projections within the next two weeks.

Decisions Made

- None formally voted upon. Brainstormed anniversary concepts are subject to further development and vetting by staff and the relevant committees.

Action Items

- Kristin Johnson / Executive Office: Locate David Lim's historical ARO photo archives for use in anniversary display planning.
- TBD: Compile a list of the 50 highest-cited JARO papers for use in anniversary programming.
- Kristin Johnson / Executive Office: Finalize the San Francisco meeting budget incorporating industry-level revenue projections. Due: approximately June 29, 2026.

Summary

The June 15, 2026 ARO Council meeting covered a broad range of strategic and operational topics. The meeting opened with a presentation from PMG's Grants Management team, who introduced their capacity to support ARO in identifying and pursuing federal funding opportunities through agencies such as the CDC, NIH, and HRSA. Kristin Johnson then presented a synthesis of committee chair feedback on strategic planning priorities, surfacing consistent themes around attendance barriers, virtual programming preferences, international engagement challenges, and clinical participation that will inform the forthcoming membership survey.

The Council addressed the Membership Committee's persistent scope confusion, directing the Executive Office to clarify the committee's charge and reduce it to 2-3 well-defined priorities. The Council also voted to transition oversight of the SpARO mentoring program from trainees to the Membership Committee and staff, ensuring continuity beyond individual trainee tenures. On awards, the Council deferred any new junior award category pending a review of Young Investigator Award eligibility, and Johnson updated the Council on the ongoing search for a new JARO Editor-in-Chief.

The Council approved key parameters for the strategic planning survey: a two-week urgent response window and a leadership cover letter to accompany distribution. The meeting closed with a brainstorm on 50th anniversary celebration concepts - including a historical photo installation, a JARO citation retrospective, and themed social programming - all evaluated against the constraint that San Francisco food and beverage costs are projected to significantly exceed the prior year's meeting.

Decisions Made (Consolidated)

- Council agreed to transition SpARO mentoring program oversight from trainees to the Membership Committee and/or Parthenon staff to ensure program continuity.
- Council agreed to defer creation of a new junior award pending the Awards Committee's review of Young Investigator Award eligibility criteria.
- Council approved a two-week "urgent" response window for the strategic planning membership survey.
- Council agreed to include a letter from Council leadership accompanying the survey distribution.

Action Items (Consolidated)

Kristin Johnson / Executive Office

- Follow up with the Awards Committee to initiate a review of YIA eligibility criteria and evaluate junior award proposals.
- Coordinate with Shelby and Michael Roberts to formalize faculty and staff support for the SpARO mentoring program.
- Contact the Membership Committee chair to provide a clarified committee scope and 2-3 specific priority goals.
- Draft a Council leadership cover letter to accompany the strategic planning survey.
- Locate David Lim's historical ARO photo archives for 50th anniversary planning.
- Finalize the San Francisco meeting budget with industry revenue projections. Due: approximately June 29, 2026.

Mike and Matt / Strategic Planning Working Group

- Incorporate demographic questions and committee chair feedback into the final survey instrument. Due: June 17, 2026.

TBD

- Compile a list of the 50 highest-cited JARO papers for 50th anniversary programming.