Introduction

Thank you for your service to MLA. Serving as a committee chair within the organization can be a busy task, and your work is much appreciated.

The responsibilities for committee chairs are outlined in Section VI of the Administrative Handbook and in the Committee Handbook Template. The purpose of this guide is not to supersede those documents, but rather to supplement them with explanations of the frequent tasks that committee chairs do. As you begin your term as chair, you should read all three documents carefully.¹

If any conflicts arise between documents, the Administrative Handbook is the official record and should be followed.

¹ You may also find the Index to Board Policies and the Archive of Board Minutes helpful to find more detail on almost any topic on which the Board has made a decision in the past.
Recruiting Members

If you begin your term at the annual meeting, one of the first things you’ll do as a new committee chair is to bring in new members and work with the President to get them appointed. Chairs of subcommittees will follow the same process, but they should keep their umbrella committee chair informed along the way.

When appointing new members, try to consider diversity from a broad spectrum, from aspects of identity (racial/ethnic, gender identity, and so on), aspects of professional characteristics (classified staff, librarians, public library workers, academic library workers), and geographic distribution of members. Also take into account levels of experience, recognizing that new members can bring fresh perspectives, and retired members can bring great experience and wisdom. Use these factors to help you build a committee that invites a variety of voices while also offering opportunities to people who might not have had as much input before.

Ideally, you will have worked with your predecessor during the annual meeting to meet prospective members through Get Involved, talking with visitors to your business meeting, or a following up with those who respond to broader call for members to MLA-L that many chairs issue prior to the conference. Leading up to the meeting, the Planning and Reports Officer from the Board will work with you to determine the number of vacancies that you need to fill; the PRO will send a list with all committee vacancies to MLA-L. There is no fixed size for most committees and subcommittees. With the exception of awards committees, the right size is one that allows the group to do its work effectively while keeping all members as engaged as possible.

When you have identified the likely candidates—ideally by sometime in April—and they have confirmed their interest in joining the committee, share your recommendations directly with the President (i.e., not in a Board report). Memberships are not confirmed until the President approves the appointments, but members may start actively participating in the committee as soon as that presidential approval comes. Appointment letters and website updates will follow. When you submit your proposed roster of new committee members, you should also inform the President of anyone scheduled to rotate off the committee.

Some committees have extensive processes to review prospective candidates, much like an application and review process, while others are much more informal. In any case, aim for fairness and flexibility so that the selection process is free of bias and that it allows for those who aren’t already insiders to find a place. As of fall 2021, we have a task force addressing how committee members and recruitment practices are done, and there will likely be changes in the future to create a consistent method across all committees.

Be sure to review each committee’s charge in the Administrative Handbook if you have questions about the committee’s mission or about any ex officio roles that might be assigned to your
committee.²

**Committee Chairs Mailing List**

Once new committee appointments are updated, you will be added to the electronic mailing list for committee chairs. This process can sometimes take a while, so please work with your predecessor to be sure that any messages that come through the list before you’re added to it get forwarded to you.

**Subcommittees**

Subcommittees should work through the parent committee chair for reports, budget requests, and program requests. Membership of subcommittees is typically passed through the parent committee chair for submission to the President for approval.

**Reports**

*“Quarterly” Reports*

Three times throughout the year—usually January, April, and September—there will be a call for a so-called “quarterly” report. These help the Board and all MLA members to know what is going on throughout the organization and creates a sense of accountability for all members participating in MLA activities.

The call for reports will come from the President to the committee chairs mailing list and to MLA-L, and will include a template and a deadline. You should include in your report activities that have happened since last quarterly report. If you have specific action you are proposing or need Board approval, please list those requests in the “Board Action Required” field. You may also request Board action between meetings for urgent matters by getting in touch with the President, but it’s expected that most routine and ongoing work requests will be listed in these periodic reports. See the [Past Board Meeting Agendas page](#) for examples.

All reports will be compiled and linked on the MLA website prior to the upcoming Board meeting and all members have the opportunity to review them. Board members read all reports, but usually only discuss those that include a request for a decision or action.

² Unless otherwise specified in the description of the committee in the Administrative Handbook, *ex officio* members are voting members.
In your spring Board report, be sure to list the status of each committee member’s activity relative to the Implicit Bias requirement. No member needs to indicate how they met the requirement, just that they have met it.

**Annual Report**

The annual report differs from the quarterly reports in that it includes a summary of activities from the entire preceding year and aligns those activities with the strategic plan and with the prior year’s goals. In the annual report, committee chairs will also outline goals for the forthcoming year, again, using the strategic plan for guidance. Review previous annual reports for examples.

The call for annual reports will come in the summer; as of fall 2021, these calls are initiated by the Early Career/Student member of the Board. You will submit this report via a web form.

**Comparison of Reports**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarterly Reports</th>
<th>Annual Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/year: winter, spring, and fall</td>
<td>1/year: late summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covers activities since last quarterly report</td>
<td>Summarizes previous year’s activities and ties them to the strategic plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call comes from the President</td>
<td>Call comes from the Student/Early Career Representative (as of 2021-2022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will appear publicly a few weeks after submission</td>
<td>Will appear publicly later in the fall as part of a comprehensive MLA annual report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes summary of implicit bias testing/training (for spring report only)</td>
<td>Outlines goals for the coming year</td>
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**Program Proposals**

Calls for the program usually come in the late spring or early summer from the chair of the Program Committee. Many committees find it beneficial to start talking about potential program ideas as early as the annual meeting.

Committees are not required to make program proposals for the conference, but such sessions help other MLA members learn about new ideas in the profession or in committees themselves. Sometimes, other committees or members from outside committees will approach your committee to suggest a joint proposal. It is also possible that the Program Committee will suggest a collaboration between committees or members who propose similar topics.
You can usually expect to hear whether a session has been accepted for the program by late summer or early fall.

**Room Requests for Meetings**

In the spring or summer—usually after the call for programs—there will be another call from the Program Committee Chair, this time for meeting spaces. You’ll need to work with your committee members to learn what other conference events might affect their availability so that the Program Committee can try to avoid as many conflicts as possible.

**Meetings**

The committee chair is responsible for setting and distributing the agenda ahead of their business meeting, as well as presiding over the meeting. It is not necessary to have committee meetings throughout the rest of the year, but it is often beneficial to meet to keep momentum on projects and other activities strong.

**Budget Requests**

Each spring, there will be a call from the Board’s Fiscal Officer for budget requests. These will be sent directly to chairs who typically submit budget requests, but the call will come out on the Committee Chairs mailing list, too. No committees are required to submit budget requests, if they have no financial needs in a given year. Examples of requests that committees submit include travel that supports MLA’s strategic activities, survey costs, equipment for conducting oral histories, and so on. The Board will review these at the late spring/early summer meeting, and the Fiscal Officer will follow up with all requestors with the final decisions on funding.

**Maintaining Committee Handbook**

Ideally, your committee should have a handbook that was created around 2014 and (ideally) updated since. Alas, some of these handbooks have been lost to the sands of time, while some newer committees have probably never had one.

If there is not a link for a handbook on your committee’s page linked from the committees section of the MLA site (either in the public view or in the view you have when you are signed in to your MLA account), check with your predecessor to see if they have a copy of it. If not, download the Committee Handbook Template from the committees section, and add information that is particular to your committee. The purpose of the handbook is to ensure continuity between chairs, so be sure to pass a current version on to your successor. You may also keep committee documents accessible to committee members by posting them in your committee’s section of the web site (under “pages,” when you’re logged in).
Transition of Chair

As you approach the end of your term as chair, you should start soliciting a new chair from the current committee membership. As with other committee appointments, the President has the final approval of chair appointments. If you are having difficulty identifying a successor, start working with the President early to brainstorm alternatives. You’ll find it helpful to have identified a likely successor by the time of the annual meeting so that they can work with you on recruitment of new members.