

## **Background on proposed committee structures**

Over the past year and a half, the Steering Committee has been debating potential revisions to MARAC's Constitution and Bylaws that will update them to best meet the needs of the organization today. Even further, the members of Steering Committee have viewed these changes with an eye toward positioning the organization for the future, allowing MARAC to meet new challenges effectively and adjust as necessary in a flexible manner.

One of the more notable structural changes proposed during this process is the consolidation of the Arline Custer Award Committee, the Distinguished Service Award Committee, the Finding Aids Award Committee, and a newly-created Scholarship Committee into a single body, known as the Awards Committee.

The first element in this proposal is the recommendation to form a new six-member Scholarship Committee, with individuals elected by the MARAC membership to serve three-year staggered terms. This committee would take over the scholarship responsibilities currently held by the Education Committee, whose members are not elected. The rationale behind this recommendation is to bring the practice for how monetary awards are handled for the Marsha Trimble Meeting Scholarships, the Meeting Travel Assistance Awards, and the Leonard Rappoport Modern Archives Institute Scholarships in line with best practices already instituted by MARAC's other award committees, as well as to avoid the appearance of impropriety. We believe that scholarships should be awarded by elected members of MARAC rather than members appointed by the MARAC Chair.

The second element in this proposal is the recommendation to combine the Arline Custer Award Committee, the Finding Aids Award Committee, the Distinguished Service Award Committee, and the newly-formed Scholarship Committee into a single body. This new Awards Committee would be chaired by a person elected to a three-year term by the MARAC membership. The chair would coordinate the activities of the individual awards committees as well as represent them all on the Steering Committee. The rationale for this change is to ensure communication and coordination among awards operations and guarantee consistency in the administration and publicity of the various awards.

A few MARAC members have raised concerns regarding the second element in this proposal, primarily focusing on the fact that only the chair of the newly consolidated Awards Committee would serve on Steering Committee rather than the four individual chairs of Arline Custer, Finding Aids, Scholarship, and Distinguished Service. A response to this concern is to equate this change to the operation of the Meetings Coordinating Committee. That committee is composed of individual committees that are charged with carrying out a core operational mission of the organization – namely, organizing speakers and coordinating logistics for our spring and fall meetings. Neither the Local Arrangements Committee nor the Program Committee are specifically mentioned in the MARAC bylaws, but they are represented by the MARAC Vice Chair/Chair of the Meetings Coordinating Committee on Steering Committee.

A further response to this concern is that chairs of the Arline Custer, Finding Aids, and other awards committees are still provided an opportunity to attend meetings of Steering Committee when they have issues to present to Steering for discussion or vote, such as suggestions for altering their evaluation

criteria or awards procedures. The fact that the chair of the Awards Committee attends the Steering Committee meetings does not preclude other awards chairs from attending on occasions when the business of Steering would benefit from their direct input.

A few other MARAC members have expressed the concern that the movement toward a consolidated Awards Committee with a single chair creates unnecessary bureaucratic complications. Some have suggested that this structure will introduce an additional layer of complexity to each committee's deliberations and will needlessly hamper the effectiveness of each committee. However, this recommendation does not mandate any changes to the operations manuals of any of the current awards committees. Each of the four awards-granting bodies will still operate independently within the larger Awards Committee. Each committee, composed of its elected members, will still be responsible for evaluating applications and nominations to determine the most qualified recipient for each award.

The only difference to operations, if this recommendation is implemented, is that the chairs of each of the award committees will have a dedicated forum for discussing the operations of their respective committees. Shared issues and challenges, such as soliciting applicants and nominees, coordinating publicity and the timing of announcements, or assessing evaluation criteria, can each be addressed in regular meetings of this new Awards Committee.

In the end, the new Awards Committee structure will continue to offer opportunities for members of the Arline Custer Award Committee, the Finding Aids Award Committee, and the Distinguished Service Award Committee (as well as the new Scholarship Committee) to participate in shared governance. It will also provide a convenient means for the chairs of each of the awards committees to discuss topics of mutual concern and interest, ensuring that MARAC's various awards are consistently and effectively administered. Once again, the Meetings Coordinating Committee serves as an excellent model where various component committees have their work organized under a single chair, providing a means for discussion, collaboration, and coordination that has proven to be successful through the years. We believe this same model holds promise for the administration of our robust awards program, which recognizes the achievements of our colleagues and also supports the educational aspirations of our newer colleagues.