

## **PAEA Volunteer Structure Report**

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In July, we completed a yearlong process that has transformed our volunteer structure. The changes will improve our Board, volunteer, and staff collaboration and allow us to hit the target on our most important initiatives.

Throughout this work, we held fast to two core principles:

1. **PAEA is a member-led, volunteer-guided, staff-implemented organization.** We all have different roles to play, and this foundation ensured that our approach respected and made the most of the unique contributions of all three groups.
2. **"Build with, not for."** This is a concept we love, part of our commitment to work collaboratively at all levels to build PAEA together.

The result is a more effective, more focused volunteer structure – one that will allow PAEA members to play a more strategic role in PAEA's work.

### **Some Background**

Last year, to help kick off our continued work on revising our strategy, the Board asked that all 14 of our councils develop two documents:

1. A **retrospective report**, reflecting on the successes and the challenges that the council has experienced in the last three years
2. A **prospective report**, predicting the opportunities and challenges that the council in particular and PAEA as a whole will face in the next three years

The results were *dramatic*. Across all volunteer groups, reflected in both the retrospective and prospective reports, we got a clear message that our volunteers wanted five things:

1. **Enhanced role clarity.** What decisions and outcomes are the different roles (Board, volunteers, and staff) responsible for?
2. **Clearer Board direction.** What does success look like for my council from the Board's point of view?
3. **Richer communication.** What's happening across PAEA, beyond just my individual council?
4. **Alignment and integration.** What can my council do to reinforce the work of other groups?
5. **Effective use of volunteer time.** What's the most valuable way I can personally contribute, given the limited time I have to invest?

The reports emphasized that councils and staff were doing important work that advanced PA education nationally – and that this work could be made even better with some improvements to the volunteer structure.

With this feedback, the Board and staff researched ways to take our volunteer structure to the next level.

Backed by industry research, discussions with peer associations, and additional feedback from our volunteers, we developed a few different ideas. Then we iterated these back and forth with the Board, chairs, and staff until we all converged on a simple, flexible approach that addressed all five of the issues that volunteers wanted improved.

### **Four Squares**

PAEA is a solutions-focused place, so we began by asking: **“What works really well about our current structure?”**

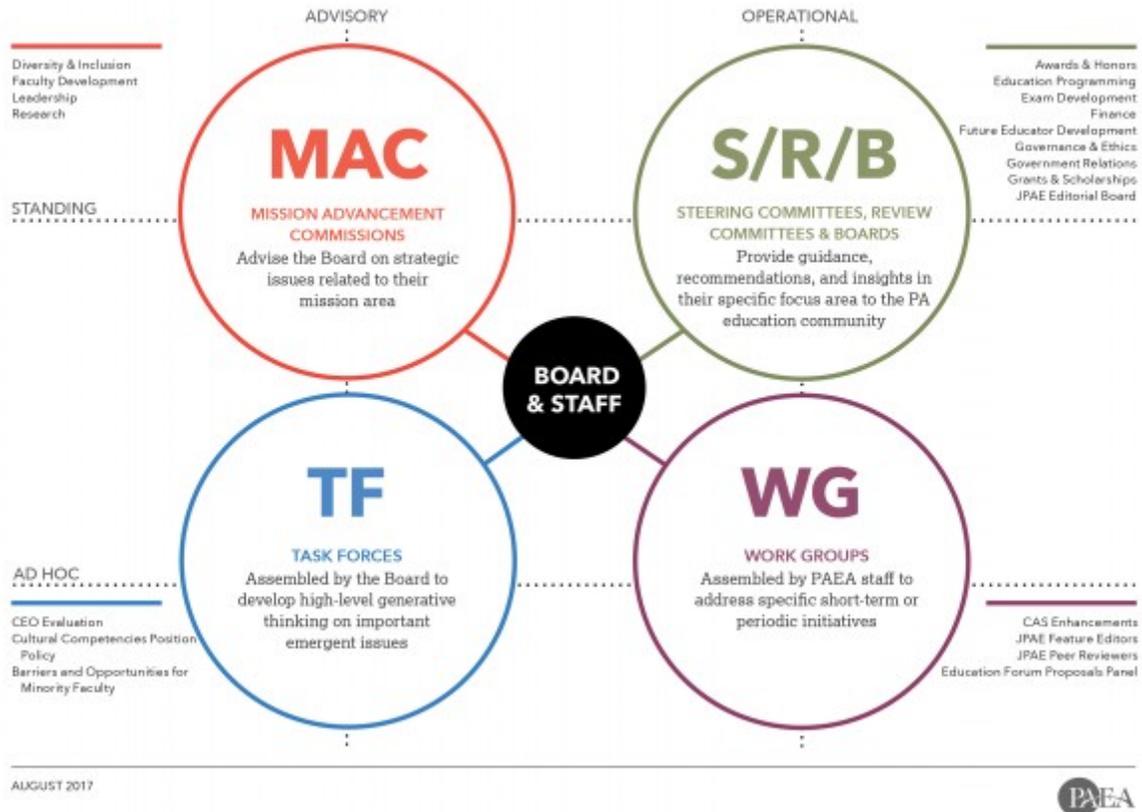
One answer was that we’ve had great success with Board task forces – groups with an extremely focused charge and a specific, concrete deliverable, that last for a short period of time. These groups are ad hoc, created when needed, and then dissolved when their work is done.

These kinds of groups have prepared responses to FPAR/OTP, drafted comments to NCCPA about recertification proposals, and developed core competencies for PA graduates (you’ll see these soon!) Their work covers the spectrum from highly advisory (here’s how to think about OTP from PAEA’s point of view) to very operational (let’s write a letter of concern to such and such).

We’ve also found success with longer lasting groups like the Finance Council, which provides strategic guidance on PAEA’s budget, guiding the Board on expressing our values and priorities through allocating money. These groups also vary between advisory and operational.

From there, we extracted the commonalities about what worked – ad hoc and standing groups, advisory and operational groups – into a general framework that we call the **Four Square Model**:

# PAEA VOLUNTEER STRUCTURE OVERVIEW



PAEA's new Four Square Model volunteer framework. (Click the image to view larger.)

The Four Square Model helped us resolve the issue that was ultimately at the core of many of the challenges our councils identified: Treating all our volunteer groups identically resulted in serving them all inadequately.

The aim, when the original "council" model was put into place several years ago, was to treat every group equally. What we've learned is that it's better to treat every group equitably – in accordance with what's being asked of them and based on their unique contribution to PAEA. Some groups need more volunteers, some groups need fewer; some groups need to work in the clouds of the ambiguous future, some groups need to work in the weeds of today's demands; and so on.

## Commissions and Committees

Once the general framework was in place, we turned to figuring out which groups belonged where, based on their unique work and their role in PAEA. Some groups were combined to build on shared strengths, and a few groups were dissolved as PAEA has developed new ways to address the work they handled.

In general, here's what each kind of group is designed to do:

**Mission Advancement Commissions (MACs):** Advisory groups focused on our mission pillars of diversity and inclusion, faculty development, leadership, and research. MACs advise the Board on issues related to their mission area and conduct environmental scanning for emerging trends and best practices.

**Steering Committees, Review Committees, and Boards:** Operational groups that provide guidance, advice, recommendations, and insights from the PA education community on a specific area, project, or initiative. The work of these groups contributes directly to the day-to-day work of PAEA, and manifests in specific products, services, and activities.

**Task Forces:** Ad hoc advisory groups assembled by the Board to investigate and prepare high-level generative and strategic thinking on important emergent issues (e.g., optimal team practice, accreditation).

**Work Groups:** Ad hoc functional groups assembled by PAEA staff to address specific initiatives that are either short-term or periodic in nature (e.g., focus groups, abstract reviewers).

This is the basic volunteer structure; we'll be sharing more details about how it is working in the coming weeks and months.

## A Leadership Circle

The final thing we did as part of this work was establish a formal Leadership Circle – a group comprising the Board, volunteer chairs, and staff – to act as joint stewards of our updated Board/volunteer/staff framework and processes.

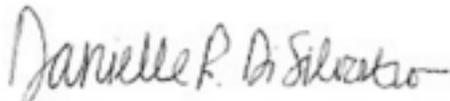
We did this to make explicit our goal of having the Board, volunteers, and staff all work at the top of their game – with everyone contributing at a generative, strategic, and operational level as issues and projects require. Our driving motivation was to pull down the walls and remove the obstacles to effective collaboration between members and staff.

We expect to evolve the whole system as we move forward, adjusting as we learn more about the work and how to work even more effectively together.

2017 is the 50th anniversary of the profession, but in many ways, we're just getting started. We're incredibly thankful for the contributions of the Board, volunteers, and staff to this realignment and their commitment to shared success.

And remember - there are many opportunities for you to volunteer for interesting and fulfilling service to the Association and to PA education. Next week, we'll be posting our volunteer openings. Submit your application and help us take PAEA and PA education to the next level!

Respectfully submitted,



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