

Membership Committee: Peer-Review Guidelines

The Membership Committee is one of four standing committees of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works. According to the AIC Bylaws, no member of a standing committee may also be on the AIC Board of Directors. The committee consists of five members, all peer-reviewed members of AIC in good standing and including at least three Fellows and at least one Professional Associate, “. . . for the purpose of reviewing Professional Associate and Fellow membership applications.” [AIC Bylaws, amended April 30, 2015] By agreeing to serve on the committee, members who are Professional Associates acknowledge that they will not be eligible to apply for Fellow designation while serving their term.

All AIC committees are assigned board and staff liaisons to offer advice and guidance and to be sure that each committee has the tools and resources necessary to fulfill its charge. Revisions to committee charges, policies, or procedures are reviewed and approved by the AIC Board of Directors. The board liaison assists the committee in preparing requests for action by the board, takes the requests to the board, and reports back to the committee. Staff liaisons assist the committee in the gathering of application materials as well as providing administrative support and clarification on matters of membership.

To facilitate reviews, the committee will create and maintain a pool of ten to fifteen AIC peer-reviewed members as adjunct reviewers. The adjunct reviewers will have a range of specialties and have experience with the peer-review process and qualification requirements. Adjunct reviewers are approved by the AIC Board of Directors.

AIC Committee requirements include:

- With the assistance of the committee, the chair provides written reports to the Board of Directors, through the liaison, prior to the May and November board meetings. Submission dates are provided by the liaison.
- Committees submit occasional articles to *AIC News* as agreed on with the *AIC News* editor and the board and staff liaisons.
- The committee chair, or designee, attends the annual Internal Advisory Group (IAG) meeting held in Washington, DC in November.
- During the month of August, the committee chair and the staff liaison agree on an annual committee budget, which is completed by the deadline established by the AIC finance office. The budget typically provides for basic operating expenses. Travel funds to participate in the IAG meeting are in a separate budget, and requests for travel expense reimbursements are handled with the staff liaison.
- Committees announce open positions in *AIC News*, although committee members may also solicit applications and request suggestions for potential candidates from the board or staff.

Committees review their charge and procedures at least every two years and recommend updates and revisions as needed.

The Membership Committee reviews member applications following three application deadlines each year: January 1, July 1, and October 1.

The review process is as follows:

- Following receipt of fees and completed application forms, which include a letter of recommendation from each of three individual sponsors, a staff liaison provides committee members with access to the materials electronically.
- All Professional Associate applications are reviewed by three committee members, as determined by the chair. One reviewer is always the chair, and one reviewer (who may also be the chair) shares the specialty of the applicant. An adjunct reviewer can be called on to provide additional specialty expertise.
- Fellow applications are reviewed by all committee members.
- During this process and with the assistance of the staff liaison, the chair schedules a committee meeting, to be held by conference call, to discuss pending applications. Board and staff liaisons are included in the scheduled meeting.
- Prior to the meeting, reviewers provide a brief written summary of the merits and weaknesses of each application (template to be provided) that indicates “recommend approval,” “recommend discussion,” or “recommend to not approve.”
- Those recommendations that received “recommend approval” from all reviewers are approved as a group without discussion during the committee meeting.
- All other applications are presented by a committee member in the same specialty as the applicant, and additional assessments are provided by other reviewers of the application. These applications are discussed by the full committee. If questions/concerns are addressed to the committee’s satisfaction, the application is accepted.
- The committee relies on the recommendations of the sponsors to verify the details of the applicant’s work, experience, and education. The chair of the committee may contact the sponsors regarding questions or concerns.
- Once accepted, the applicant is notified by the staff liaison and receives a certificate representing their attainment of peer-reviewed designation signed by the AIC board president.
- If questions are raised, sponsors may be asked to provide additional information to the committee. In this case, the applicant is notified of the status of their application and the application is held until the next review cycle, pending submission of the requested information.
- If an application is declined, the reviewing member(s) must submit their reasoning for declining the application to the chair in written form.
- If a majority of committee members cannot agree on an application, the board liaison and the chair will identify three additional adjunct reviewers to assess the application and provide recommendations. If the three recommendations are not in agreement and the committee remains divided, the application is declined. When notified, the applicant is given feedback and guidance that can be incorporated into a resubmitted application.
- In consultation with the chair, AIC staff liaisons will maintain a permanent record of the activities of the committee regarding applications that were approved or declined and the reasons for declining them.

The Membership Committee plays a significant role in shaping the future leadership of AIC. Their goal is to be inclusive but, at the same time, discerning. Those being approved for a peer-reviewed membership must exhibit appropriate decision-making processes in their work and indicate their awareness of and abidance to the AIC Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice as evidenced through the applicant's essays and the reviews of the sponsors.

Sponsor recommendations are based on either their personal experience working with the applicant, or through a thorough review of the reports provided by the applicant. It is the responsibility of the sponsor to communicate directly with the applicant to address any questions or concerns regarding the applicant's methods and materials as well as the professional quality of the reports, prior to the final submission of the application. In their letters, sponsors must provide written confirmation that the applicant's work adheres to the AIC Standards of Practice and Guidelines for Practice. The committee values the opinion of sponsors and utilizes their evaluations of the applicant's professional experience.

AIC accepts different forms of conservation training, including documented apprenticeships as well as degrees from recognized conservation training programs in the US and abroad. As communicated through the recommendations of the sponsors, applicants must show a commitment to establishing and upholding professional standards, promoting research and publications, partaking in educational opportunities, and fostering the exchange of knowledge in the field. In addition, applicants must address their connection to and participation in AIC.

AIC does not use a quota system for determining how many peer-reviewed applications are approved in any one review period. The goal is to approve all qualified applicants meeting at least the minimum stated requirements on the AIC website. The committee is to encourage those whose applications do not yet meet AIC peer-review standards to resubmit at a later date, while providing guidance for a future application submission.

As of fall 2016, the Membership Committee works in association with the Membership Inclusion & Equity and Membership Designations Working Groups. While the Membership Committee has an ongoing function, the working group areas of focus will change as the needs of AIC's membership evolve. The committee and the associated working groups have a Coordinating Chair, who will collaborate with the board and staff liaisons to ensure that the committee and working groups are kept informed about, and have a voice in the topics being addressed, all of which affect AIC membership. The Coordinating Chair will also play a role in communicating about AIC membership for members and for users of conservation services.

Currently, AIC is considering approving a pathway for non-conservators responsible for the care of cultural heritage, either within an institution or in private practice, to gain peer-reviewed designation that recognizes differences in training. The committee will be part of the discussions and decision making.

Approved by the AIC board of directors, 3/13/2017