



Conference of Professional Interests  
Leadership Manual



2010

# Overview of the Conference of Professional Interests

(Adapted from the Constitution and Bylaws of AAIDD)

The Conference of Professional Interests (the Conference) coordinates the activities of the professional groups (divisions, special interest groups, and action groups) of the Association.

Members of the Conference oversee continuing education programs, promotes membership and membership services, and other pertinent issues.

The membership of the Conference consists of the President and President-Elect/Chair and Chair-Elect of each of the Association's Divisions, Special Interest Groups, and Action Groups.

## Professional Interests of the Association

When an individual joins AAIDD or renews their membership, they may join one or more professional groups, each with their own annual membership fees and additional benefits of membership, such as a newsletter, listserv, or online community presence. In addition, the membership of AAIDD is divided geographically into state and regional chapters, each of which may also establish divisions, special interest groups, or action groups.

### Divisions

Divisions represent specific professional or occupational areas of interest and members may represent a specific discipline. Current Divisions are:

- Administration Division
- Communication Disorders Division
- Community Services Division
- Direct Support Professionals Division
- Education Division
- Gerontology Division
- Legal Process and Advocacy Division
- Psychology Division
- Religion & Spirituality Division
- Social Work Division

### Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

SIGs address a particular topic or interest in the field. Current SIGs are:

- Creative Arts Therapies SIG
- Families SIG
- Genetics SIG
- Mental Health Services SIG
- Multicultural Concerns SIG
- Sexual and Social Concerns SIG
- Technology SIG

### Action Groups

Action groups address timely, relevant issues in the field and/or the unique needs of the Association. Current Action Groups are:

- Criminal Justice Action Group
- Health and Wellness Action Network
- Humanism Action Network
- Hurricane Disaster Preparedness for Persons with ID
- Self-Advocate Advocacy & Organizing Action Group

# Guidance

## Criteria for Establishing a Division, SIG, or Action Group

- *Divisions* should be organized around professions or occupational interests and represent a minimum of 200 active members who make an application to the Board of Directors as prescribed in Article IX of the Constitution.
- *SIGs* should be organized around a topic or interest in the field and represent a minimum of 100 active members. To establish a SIG, a petition for creation must be presented to the Conference with (a) the names of 100 or more petitioners, (b) mission statement for the proposed SIG, (c) list of proposed goals and objectives, and (d) a request for recommendation for action by the Board of Directors.
- *Action Groups* are organized address timely, relevant issues in the field and/or the unique needs of the Association and may be established by the Board without a minimum number of active members.

## Operational Obligations

- Each group shall have a President and President-Elect/Chair and Chair-Elect who are elected for a two-year term. Vacancies will be filled by appointment by the Chair of the Conference.
- Groups should adopt goals and objectives that are in alignment with the Association's mission and strategic plan.
- Groups may not have bylaws, goals, or objectives that are in conflict with the Association's constitution and bylaws. Bylaws, if adopted, must reflect the name, purpose, and membership criteria established by AAIDD.
- Groups shall submit an annual report to the Board of Directors detailing their activities and progress on goals and objectives.

## Activity Level

- The Conference shall conduct an annual review of the activity level of each group.
- The Chair of the Conference, with the assistance of the President Pro Tem and the national office staff, will gather information on activity level and membership, and such information will be shared with members of the Conference and the Board to facilitate activities to modify, strengthen, or dissolve groups with low activity levels.
- The Chair of the Conference, with the assistance of the President Pro Tem, will communicate with members of the group and support the development of an action plan to increase membership, increase activities, or establish leadership. In the event that such efforts are unsuccessful, the Conference may recommend to the Board of Directors that the group be dissolved.

## Criteria for Dissolution

The Conference may recommend to the Board of Directors to dissolve a group when a group:

- falls below the minimum requirement for active members,
- does not engage in activities and is no longer active in the affairs of the Association,
- engages in activities that the Board deems are contrary to the mission, goals, or activities of the Association,
- fails to secure leadership nominees,
- fails to respond to annual conference communications or calls for papers, or
- self-initiates a request to dissolve.

When making a recommendation for dissolution to the Board, the Conference shall recommend a time frame for notification and final action.

## **Elections**

### **Presidents and Chairs**

- Leaders are elected typically every other year on the national ballot. Approximately one-half of the leadership positions are up for election each year.
- Only members of the group may vote for a candidate. Elections are managed by the Nominations and Elections Committee.
- Leaders take office July 1 and end their terms on June 30. The term of office is typically two years.

### **President Pro Tem of the Conference**

A President Pro Tem of the Conference shall be elected annually by the members of the Conference by secret ballot and by a majority vote.

### **Substitutes and Replacements**

If any of the Conference Presidents/Chairs are unable to fulfill their obligations, the Chair of the Conference (Board Vice-President or President-Elect) will appoint a replacement based on the most recent election results.

## **Duties of Professional Interest Presidents/Chairs**

1. Promote the Association's mission to professionals and others. This may include individuals who are not familiar with AAIDD.
2. Promote the group's professional interests and collaborate with other groups of the Association.
3. Promote and support membership services and recruitment within one's group.
4. Ascertain important issues and information from members within one's group and communicate directly with other group leaders, state and regional chapters, and the staff of the Association.
5. Actively engage the membership of one's group in issues related to the shared professional interest of the group.
6. Meet at the annual conference of the Association and at other meetings as called. These meetings will be chaired by either the Vice-President or President-Elect of the Board, or in his/her absence, the President Pro Tem of the Conference.
7. Communicate relevant information to one's group before and after official meetings of the Conference.
8. Submit an annual report and an action plan to the Board of Directors using the format supplied by the Board.
9. Select a representative to serve on the AAIDD Nominations and Elections Committee annually. This individual shall be an incoming, current, or outgoing President/Chair.
10. Solicit nominations for President/Chair of the group and submit those names to the Chair of the Nominations and Elections Committee.
11. Orient incoming President/Chair, and serve as an ongoing consultant as past-President or past-Chair for a year.

## **Conference Duties of the Board Vice-President or President-Elect**

The responsibility for leadership of the Conference will alternate between the President-Elect and Vice-President every two years—that is, the individual elected Vice-President will work with either the Conference or Assembly for the two-year period prior to becoming President of the Board.

1. Serve as President/Chair of the Conference of Professional Interests.
2. Work with the President/Chair of the Assembly of Regions in preparing meeting agendas.
3. Assure that the Conference meetings are scheduled appropriately during the Association's annual meeting.
4. Report recommendations of the Conference to the Board of Directors and communicate Board decisions to Conference members as necessary.
5. Orient new incoming Conference Presidents/Chairs, including supplying them with the Leadership Manual.

## Meetings of the Conference

- The meetings of the Conference shall be scheduled at the Association's annual meeting, mid-winter business meeting, and others as called.
- Meeting agendas will be developed by the Vice-President/President-Elect with input from the President Pro Tem; the agendas will be delivered to Conference members by the AAIDD office staff at least 2 weeks prior to the meetings.
- The meetings will be chaired by the Vice-President/President-Elect with assistance from the President Pro Tem.
- New members of the Conference will be oriented by Vice-President/President-Elect with assistance from the President Pro-Tem.
- The meetings are open to all interested parties; however only members of the Conference (Presidents, President-Elects, Chairs, and Chair-Elects) may vote. The Vice-President/President-Elect may vote to break a tie.
- Conference Meetings are intended to provide:
  1. Each member with the opportunity to express (verbally or in written form) views on any pertinent issue--such as membership, education, research, etc.-- that the Conference needs to consider. The discussion may or may not result in a vote.
  2. A platform to discuss and vote on matters of action requested by the Board of Directors.
  3. A platform to discuss and vote on recommendations to the Board or for issues referred to the Board for consideration.
  4. The opportunity for reporting by members on the progress of committees or other activities of interest.
  5. A platform to discuss any special projects that the Conference might undertake and assign members to committees as necessary.