



National Women's Studies Association

2016-2019 Strategic Direction

Overview

Established in 1977, the National Women's Studies Association is a growing, dynamic organization dedicated to strengthening the field of women's studies and serving its members.

For example:

- The Association hosted its largest annual conference in 2014 in San Juan, Puerto Rico and anticipates its largest domestic conference registration numbers for the 2015 meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- In 2013 the organization launched a regional meeting strategy intended to bring together faculty and staff from NWSA member institutions for networking and professional development opportunities.
- Member engagement is high: nearly 30 candidates ran for 5 positions in the spring 2014 election, and 7 new constituency groups were added for the 2016 membership year.

Strategic planning has played an important role in helping NWSA become the vital organization it is today. For example, a previous planning process led the organization's leaders to move the conference from June to November.

The Association and its leaders have built on those successes and NWSA is now at an exciting stage of development that can be fostered through targeted planning.

Over the course of the summer and early fall a strategic planning committee met to discuss NWSA's current position and future direction. The committee included the following:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vivian M. May, President• Nana Osei-Kofi, Vice President• Carrie Baker, Secretary• Diane Harriford, Treasurer• Adela C. Licon, Elections Chair• Yi-Chun Tricia Lin, Past President | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beverly Guy-Sheftall, NWSA President 2009-2011• Amanda Lock-Swarr, At-Large Member• Stephanie Troutman, At-Large Member• Allison Kimmich, Executive Director• Patti Provance, Deputy Director• Kira Wisniewski, Director of Operations |
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Committee discussions included an exploration of NWSA's bylaws, financial position, membership trends, decision-making and leadership structures. During the process, the committee also shared its ideas with the Governing Council at its June 2015 meeting and incorporated the feedback it received into its discussions. The following summarizes the ideas and direction that the Governing Council will consider for approval at its meeting in November.

Goals and Vision

NWSA's goals for the next 3 years will focus on:

- **Sustained Membership and Enhanced Programming**
- **Expanded Pathways to Leadership**
- **Strengthened Governance and Internal Investments**

Pursuit of these goals throughout the organization will move an already-strong NWSA forward toward a vision in which:

- The Association ensures that its **membership** remains engaged and committed – via a cutting-edge annual conference, professional development opportunities across career stages, and new programs
- **Programming** continues to propel the field forward with attention to transnational, intersectional, and critical feminist scholarship, questions of access, structural disparities in the academy and beyond, and public scholarship
- **Pathways to leadership** are visible, varied, and supported via structural changes such as regular term limits and electronic voting for all leadership positions
- **Governance** is streamlined and reorganized to better serve members

Strategies for Success

Pursuit of these goals will take different forms over time. Initially, the planning committee has developed recommendations that build upon NWSA's committed membership, programming strategies, and governance structure as the means for achieving success.

Membership Analysis and Summer Institutes

As a membership organization, NWSA's vitality depends upon a dedicated, robust membership base. The planning committee examined membership data from the past three years for individuals and institutions to identify trends and areas where the Association can work to improve.

The committee's preliminary exploration of the data pointed to the need for more detailed information that only members themselves can provide. NWSA staff will conduct a member survey to better **understand membership trends, identify ways to enhance members' experiences, and plan growth strategies.**

The committee is particularly excited to propose a "new" program element to NWSA that simultaneously builds on past success: piloting a **schedule of summer institutes**. A three-year cycle rotating among public scholarship and media, curriculum, and leadership will:

- Present opportunities to continue conference themes and/or explore new areas for the field
- Provide a more intensive experience in counterpoint to the breadth and growing size of the annual conference
- Build and maintain momentum while taking advantage of current NWSA staff capacity

With the institutes may come new opportunities for partnership, member development, field advancement, publication, and perhaps funding in the form of grant opportunities.

Internal Investments and Financial Review

Because NWSA has developed such a strong financial profile over the last decade – a result of conservative budgeting combined with thoughtful risk-taking – the planning committee was able to dedicate time to thinking about expanding current organization programs and developing financial policies to sustain NWSA in the future.

The planning committee evaluated various options for investing NWSA reserve funds in new or existing programs and is pleased to recommend **doubling NWSA's travel grant program** along with investing in **summer institutes** (described above). Committee members recognize that travel grant awards are an important reflection of NWSA's feminist commitments.

However, in order to maintain its solid financial profile and continue investing in important programs, the planning committee is also recommending an **increase in some membership rates**. The committee noted that rates have not been raised in five years, and that modest increases in some categories are crucial for NWSA's sustainability.

In addition, NWSA will develop:

- Cash allocation policies to ensure responsible cash flow reserves in support of operations
- Asset investment policies that ensure appropriate management of all assets to generate revenue
- Designation of special purpose and quasi-endowment reserves in support of long-term needs

- Strategic investment in the organization when reserves are available

Category	Purpose / Use <i>listed in priority order</i>	Time Horizon			
		Short 0-6 mo	Mid-Term 6-12 12-24		Long 24+
Operating Cash	Manage day-to-day, month-to-month cash flow needs and variations	x			
Operating Reserve	Manage unexpected events, pay back when used – internal credit	x	x	x	
Special Purpose	Fund strategic goals to enhance mission and/or capacity		x	x	x
Quasi-Endowment	Create capital that can support any or all categories				x

*** Both questions are separate and apart from where the money is kept and in what proportion (e.g., checking, savings, CDs, securities, etc.)*

The chart below reflects NWSA's asset growth over time.

	12/31/12	12/31/13	12/31/14
Profit & Loss			
Revenue	\$658,159	\$679,950	\$638,050
Expenses	\$589,482	\$578,560	\$629,034
Net Gain	\$68,677	\$101,390	\$9,016
Balance Sheet			
Assets	\$828,967	\$959,361	
Liabilities	\$55,160	\$73,953	
Fund Balance	\$773,807	\$885,408	

Pathways to Leadership and Strengthened Governance

One strategy for change entails a re-envisioning of NWSA's bylaws to:

- Offer numerous paths to leadership for its members through an open, simplified structure
- Make sure that the entire structure, including voting practices, elections cycles, and rotation of leadership reinforces NWSA's core commitments as a feminist organization
- Make the bylaws as understandable, implementable and transparent as possible

Once the suggested changes are in place, the Governing Council will regularly assess their effectiveness within this revised structure.

Highlights of Proposed Bylaws *

The re-envisioned bylaws include a number of exciting advancements, including:

- ✓ **Simplifying member engagement.**
Addition of the Delegate Assembly in 2005 added a layer of process, complexity and scheduling for members. Returning to a structure in which the Member Assembly speaks directly to the Governing Council will increase member engagement in the process overall. Similarly, simplifying how constituent groups are formed and continue underscores that the goal of having such structures is for members to engage one another in meaningful ways, advance the field and provide pathways to leadership. Finally, adding a Member Liaison role to the Governing Council provides a clear point of contact for members throughout the year.
- ✓ **Unifying elections, terms and term limits.**
Members and leaders alike have often been confused by the varying terms, term limits and election processes within NWSA. The revised bylaws unify all elections onto a single annual ballot. They also apply one consistent term length (two years) and one term limit (six years) to all elected positions. This reduces confusion, increases transparency, encourages leadership turnover, reduces burnout, and opens pathways to leadership.
- ✓ **Opening up the Governing Council structure.**

In the past Governing Council seats have been tied to specific titles. For example, a member would run to be Elections Chair rather than simply a member of the Governing Council. This has meant that a member had to want and have access to a specific seat on the Council in order to be elected. In addition many seats were elected by a sub-set of the membership rather than the membership as a whole (e.g., election of regional delegates then selection of one for Council participation). Moving to a structure in which individuals are elected to the Council from the membership as a whole *and then* take on roles best suited to them and the compliment of skills on the Council at that time, will make the GC's committee structures more flexible and thus able to address member needs more readily.

✓ **Uncoupling programming and governance.**

Until now the NWSA bylaws included program structures in governance (e.g., including the National Conference Committee in the bylaws). This can make sense when an association is volunteer-led but becomes more of a burden in more established organizations. The proposal removes programming functions and committees from the bylaws, placing them in other policy documents. It also clarifies that NWSA has "Committees of the Governing Council" which are distinct from "Program Committees": each type of committee has clear responsibilities, one related to governing and the other to programming initiatives. In doing so the bylaws focus more directly on governance and the program committees become more flexible.

** The proposed bylaws are available for review on the NWSA website. There you can find an annotated version with notes about the changes, a side-by-side version with former and proposed provisions, and a crosswalk of transitions resulting from proposed changes.*

Conclusion

NWSA is well positioned to leverage these proposed changes for exciting new growth going forward: the organization has a strong track record of successfully adapting to change. NWSA should continue to solidify and build upon gains from the past decade.