



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary Findings from Electronic Bulletin Board Postings

August 2002 – January 2003

Task Force on Association Improvement and Reorganization (TFAIR)

Task Force Values:

Transparency, Fairness, Accessibility, Inclusivity, Respect

TFAIR Members 2002-2003:

Jay Bernhardt (Chair), Cliff Akiyama, Louise Anderson, Glen Bartlett,
Leatrice Berman, Chris Day, Elsie Eyer, Jay Glasser, Phyllis Kaye,
Paul Locke, Edwin Marshall, Suzanne Nichols, Giorgio Piccagli,
Diane Rowley, Marvin Rubin, Howard Spivak

Acknowledgement:

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The full report and full text of respondent postings is available at:

<http://www.apha.org/private/tfair>

Executive Summary

From August 12, 2002, through January 17, 2003, the Task Force on Association Improvement and Reorganization (TFAIR) of the American Public Health Association (APHA) created and maintained an electronic bulletin board on the members-only area of the APHA website to collect feedback from members on areas of the association that are strong and those that need improvement. TFAIR used email messages, articles in *The Nation's Health*, and preprinted bookmarks distributed at the 2002 Annual Meeting to promote the bulletin board and encourage members to participate. The electronic bulletin board was organized by operational domains: advocacy, finances, leadership, membership, and organizational structure. Additionally, an overall improvement domain was included.

A total of 119 postings were made to the bulletin board from at least 60 different APHA members, some posted anonymously. For analysis, these comments were organized by domain and posted questions, producing more than 150 specific member comments. TFAIR subcommittees reviewed data from each domain to identify themes which were assigned and analyzed to produce this final report. Two important limitations to consider when interpreting the findings in this report are that comments were received from a relatively small number of respondents and that their comments are not necessarily representative of all APHA members.

The findings from this process revealed many aspects of the association that the respondents' perceive to be strengths, weaknesses, or sometimes both. Two cross-cutting themes emerged across all the operational domains. The first relates to a need for increased communication, specifically greater two-way communication between leaders and members and among operational units within the association, and to a need to better educate APHA members about the operations and structure of the association. The second relates to the perception that APHA does not sufficiently support or effectively utilize the expertise and abilities of its members and organizational units. These members and units are said to have a lot to contribute to the internal and external goals of the association, especially in the areas of membership recruitment, scientific expertise, and regional and national advocacy.

In the operational area of advocacy, the respondents noted the critical function of advocacy to APHA, but many observed that the association's efforts on advocacy are not sufficiently prioritized, organized, and coordinated. Furthermore, some expressed that the association lacks sufficient ideological diversity.

Regarding the association's finances, many respondents expressed a desire for greater access to and understanding of budget and financial details. Mixed perspectives were expressed regarding revenue-generating options like increasing dues or seeking corporate support, and many suggested cutting costs through increased electronic communications and greater priority setting for resource allocation.

Overall, respondents perceive the association leadership to be somewhat inaccessible and expressed a desire for greater reciprocal communication and for additional member input in important association decisions. Others expressed concern that the leadership represents a narrow political perspective and that more power should rest in other organizational units.

The large, inclusive, and experienced membership of APHA was seen by many as APHA's greatest strength, but was also observed to be a challenge for finding common ground and building consensus. Concerns were raised about the cost of membership relative to its benefits and the limited involvement that Sections and Affiliates have in recruitment and retention. In addition, many respondents noted the difficulty experienced by those who wish to get more involved in association leadership.

Many respondents described the organizational structure of APHA as complex and confusing and suggested that structural information be better communicated to members, while also exploring ways to streamline and simplify the association's operational structure. Any organizational assessment and reorganization also should consider ways to build upon the processes, infrastructure, and capacity of the primary organizational units. Many respondents also expressed confusion and concern with the relative role and responsibilities of various leadership positions, boards, and committees, and with the lack of transparency in decision-making processes.

Additional comments were received on topics such as the annual meeting, policy development, and other specific areas of operation or involvement.

TFAIR plans to review the findings from this report, along with other sources of data and member input, to develop priority areas for association improvement and specific recommendations for change that will be presented to the Governing Council at the 2003 Annual Meeting.