



AWHONN Section Governance Toolkit

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Introduction and Governance

As leaders within the AWHONN community, all volunteer leaders of AWHONN, be it at the national, Section, or Chapter level, have a duty to familiarize themselves with the mission, structure, functions, and procedures of AWHONN. Specific focus areas are listed below. All leaders should read the full version of AWHONN's bylaws, which can be found at the bottom of the ["About Us"](#) section of AWHONN's main website.

Association Overview

About AWHONN

Since 1969, the Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN) has been the foremost authority promoting the health of women and newborns and strengthening the nursing profession through the delivery of superior advocacy, research, education, and other professional and clinical resources. AWHONN represents the interests of 350,000 registered nurses working in women’s health, obstetric, and neonatal nursing across the United States.

Evidence-Based Practice:

AWHONN emphasizes that the best available evidence should guide nursing practice. Therefore, we create guidelines, books, and other resources to provide nurses with patient care information rooted in research and science. In 1969, AWHONN developed the hallmark publication, *Standards for Professional Nursing Practice in the Care of Women and Newborns*. Now in its seventh edition, it is the worldwide standard for how nurses and hospitals care for patients.

Publications:

AWHONN provides nurses with valuable industry knowledge through our [award-winning publications](#). *Nursing for Women’s Health (NWH)* delivers clinical news and commentary that nurses can immediately apply to their work. *The Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic and Neonatal Nursing (JOGNN)* has presented some of the [most important literature](#) on women’s health and newborn nursing in the last 35 years. Through [Healthy Mom&Baby](#), our consumer magazine and website, AWHONN provides news and articles covering the health topics that moms-to-be and new moms care about and can trust.

Education:

Through live, online, and self-study options, AWHONN ensures that our members never stop learning. In fact, AWHONN holds the distinction of receiving the Premier Program award from the American Nurses Credentialing Center for innovation and excellence in Continuing Nursing Education (CNE) three times.

Advocacy:

AWHONN calls upon the collective expertise of our members to inform Congress, state legislatures, and policy makers about the special health care considerations of women and newborns. From postpartum depression to preterm birth, AWHONN advocates for a wide range of issues that impact the patients our members serve. Additionally, AWHONN supports increased funding for nursing research and education to combat the ongoing nursing shortage in the United States.

Mission and Vision

The Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization that promotes the health of women and newborns. Our mission is to empower and support nurses caring for women, newborns, and their families through research, education, and advocacy.

AWHONN’s vision is, “Making a difference in the lives of women and newborns.”

Diversity Statement

AWHONN is committed to promoting diversity throughout the organization by recruiting, retaining, and mentoring a diverse workforce of women’s health and maternal child nurses. We are dedicated to integrating cultural competence and diversity into all aspects of our work and the communities we serve.

AWHONN’s Guiding Principles:

- AWHONN strives to shape a diverse work environment that promotes opportunities for personal and professional growth.
- AWHONN has a responsibility to incorporate evidence-based practice in all educational materials for the diverse populations we serve.
- AWHONN encourages a diverse workforce that complements that of women, newborns, and their families.

Governance

Overview and Role

The primary responsibility of a voluntary governance board is to establish an organization's mission, purpose, values, and direction. The work of a nonprofit board is guided by a strong commitment to a social purpose.

An effective board ensures organizational accountability to its members, donors, and the broader public through strategic planning, ongoing evaluation of programs and services, and wise utilization and expansion of organizational resources. Recognizing the unique contributions and talents of each of its members, an effective board reaches consensus on what constitutes success, encourages a shared sense of responsibility, and fosters a culture of trust, mutual respect, cooperation, and open communication.

AWHONN's governance structure consists of a Board of Directors and standing and ad hoc committees. These groups are responsible for fulfilling AWHONN's purpose by addressing issues that affect the association, its members, and women's health and neonatal nursing.

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors has 11 voting members, including three national officers and eight regional directors. AWHONN's Chief Executive Officer and Immediate Past President shall be ex officio non-voting members of the Board of Directors. Others may be appointed to the Board by the president as ex-officio members without vote. Eligibility criteria, specific functions, and terms of office can be found in the [AWHONN bylaws](#). All elected and appointed officers are required to sign Consent to Serve, Conflict of Interest, and Honoraria forms.

Section Advisory Committee Organization

Structure: The Section Advisory Committee (SAC) consists of 12 Districts. Each District is overseen by a current AWHONN full member in good standing that must have been a former elected Section leader or elected to the Board of Directors. The individual cannot be currently serving as an elected leader within AWHONN and must reside in the District they are representing. Committee members are eligible to serve two consecutive two-year terms.

Function: The SAC assists Sections in assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating strategies for success at the regional level. The SAC serves as a liaison between the Districts, Sections, Chapters, the Board of Directors, and Headquarters with activities, communications, and AWHONN-led initiatives.

Districts:

- District 1: Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana
- District 2: Nevada, California, Hawaii
- District 3: Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming
- District 4: North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa
- District 5: Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin
- District 6: Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Armed Forces
- District 7: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut
- District 8: Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York
- District 9: West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware
- District 10: Texas, Oklahoma
- District 11: Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama
- District 12: Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina

Association Headquarters

AWHONN Headquarters is comprised of professional staff that carries out the direction of the Board on behalf of the association's members. Located in the central business district of Washington, D.C., Headquarters is near Capitol Hill, the White House, and numerous governmental agencies and health care organizations. The proximity to these institutions enables AWHONN to monitor events in the health care arena and communicate valuable information about women's health, obstetric, and neonatal nursing to those whose work affects the specialties.

Headquarters is structured to maximize the ability of the elected leadership and professional staff to combine their respective skills and effectively work together in pursuit of the association's goals. Headquarters' activities are focused on developing strategies that strengthen membership, increase influence, maintain organizational capacity, and expand and diversify resources.

Headquarters operates under a philosophy that maintains a high standard of customer service and teamwork and ensures personal accountability.

AWHONN Headquarters' responsibilities are to:

- develop external and internal strategies and implement operational plans in support of AWHONN's goals and objectives,
- promote AWHONN's image and identity and that of the profession,
- deliver programs and services to members that encourage retention of current members and recruitment of new members in coordination with Sections and Chapters,
- facilitate the development of practice standards and guidelines,
- deliver educational programs in a variety of formats,
- coordinate association research and promote evidence-based practice,
- develop and manage the association's Headquarters' operating budget,
- manage the association's investment program, annual audit, and annual report to members and external audiences,
- pursue non-dues sources of revenue,
- monitor and report on federal legislation and government/regulatory issues,
- facilitate networking among Section Legislative Coordinators,
- manage the process for monitoring Section activity related to core functions, and
- manage external relations and seek collaborative opportunities with allied organizations and industry.

Section Organization

Structure: As components within the organizational structure of AWHONN, Sections must function according to AWHONN bylaws and policies and federal tax status section 501(c)(3). Each state of the United States constitutes a Section of AWHONN (e.g., AWHONN New York), as does the Armed Forces. The District of Columbia is part of Virginia, and Puerto Rico is part of Florida. No AWHONN member shall be a member of more than one Section at any given time.

Each Section shall, among other functions:

- Support implementation of AWHONN's strategic plan,
- Perform core program and fiscal functions as defined by the Board of Directors,
- Monitor, report on, and participate in the appropriate legislative and regulatory activity at the state level (in the case of domestic Sections) or the national level,
- Develop plans for providing continuing education based on member needs and the AWHONN strategic plan,
- Assist Chapters in the Section perform core functions by supporting and facilitating the program and membership development activities of the Chapter,
- Provide direction, guidance, and support in the development of new Chapters,
- Provide opportunities for leadership development and plan for leadership succession, and
- Ensure compliance with AWHONN requirements and policies.

Section Leaders

AWHONN bylaws require two elected Section leadership positions: Section Chair and Section Secretary/Treasurer. The Section Chair may appoint full members to assume special responsibilities representing major activities of the Section. Examples of appointed leaders include Chapter Coordinator, Membership Coordinator, Legislative Coordinator, Evidence-based Practice Coordinator, and Conference Coordinator.

Each Section elects as its leaders a Section Chair and a Section Secretary/Treasurer from the voting members of the Section.

Eligibility: Each candidate for an elected Section leadership position shall (1) have been a voting member of AWHONN for the two-year period immediately preceding the election, (2) be a current voting member in the year

of his/her election and during his/her term as a Section leader, and (3) be a voting member of the Section at the time of his/her election and during his/her term as Section leader. A member may not simultaneously be a candidate for more than one elected office for a leadership position or hold more than one such office or position, regardless of whether the offices or position are the national, Section, or Chapter levels.

Nominations: The Section Nominating Committee shall prepare a slate for each elected Section leadership position from among responses to an open call to all voting members of the Section and present the slate to the Section Coordinating Team for approval.

Election: The election of all elected Section leaders shall be by mail vote of the voting members of the Section conducted by print or electronic ballot. The nominee who receives the highest (even if a plurality) of the votes cast shall be elected.

Term of Office: Each elected leader shall serve a three-year term and shall be eligible for reelection but shall serve no more than two consecutive terms. All elected Section leaders shall take office January 1 immediately following their election.

Major duties of the Section Chair: The Section Chair shall, among other functions:

- Preside (if present) at all Section meetings and meetings of the Section Coordinating Team,
- Serve as Chair of the Section Coordinating Team,
- Coordinate Section activities and monitor Chapter activities,
- Provide leadership to enable the Section to perform core program and fiscal functions as defined by the Board of Directors,
- Submit periodic reports of Section program and fiscal activity (including Chapter activity) to the AWHONN Board of Directors,
- Appoint other Section leaders as necessary to carry out the functions of the Section,
- Perform all other duties usually associated with the office of the Chair, and
- Ensure Section compliance with AWHONN requirements and policies.

Major duties of Section Secretary/Treasurer: The Section Secretary/Treasurer shall, among other functions:

- Assist the Section Chair,
- Preside in the absence of the Section Chair,
- Keep the minutes of all meetings of the Section,
- Have charge of all funds and securities of the Section, including funds from Chapter, and deposit all monies in the name of AWHONN in such banks or other depositories as are designated by the Board of Directors,
- Prepare annual Section operating budgets (including Chapter activity) for Finance Committee review and Board of Directors' approval,
- Submit financial reports to Headquarters as required, and
- Perform all other customary duties of the office and other duties as assigned.

Replacement:

- If for some reason, a Section Chair is unable to serve, the Section Secretary/Treasurer shall act as Section Chair.
- The Section Chair shall be responsible for filling other leadership vacancies within the Section to complete the unexpired terms for the vacancies.
- If an elected Section leader has failed to fulfill the duties of the office, then upon written notice giving the reasons, the President shall appoint a replacement to complete the unexpired term.

Section Coordinating Team

Structure: Each Section shall have a Section Coordinating Team. The Section Coordinating Team shall be chaired by the Section Chair and comprised of the Section Secretary/Treasurer, other Section leaders as may be appointed by the Section Chair, and Chapter Coordinators within the Section.

Duties: The Section Coordinating Team shall, among other functions:

- Plan, implement, and evaluate initiative designed to support and achieve AWHONN's strategic plan,
- Plan, network, and share information about activities within the Section,
- Hold such meetings as may be deemed necessary,

- Transact all Section business,
- Create Section Committees as needed and define their duties,
- Define additional duties of elected and appointed Section leaders and other representatives on the Section Coordinating Team,
- Provide direction, guidance, and consultation to support the development of new and enhancement of existing Chapters,
- Approve the slate of nominees for each Section election, and
- Ensure compliance with AWHONN requirements and policies.

Section Nominating Committee

Structure: Each Section shall have a Section Nominating Committee. The Section Nominating Committee shall consist of the immediate past Section Chair, who shall act as Chair of the Section Nominating Committee, and at least two additional voting members of the Section and shall serve a one-year term. The two additional members shall be selected from among responses to an open call to voting members of the Section and nominations by Section and Chapter leaders. Each Section Nominating Committee shall have an odd number of members. No current member of the Section Nominating Committee may be a candidate for an elected Section leadership position or a member of the Section Coordinating Team. Sections should look to have the Section Nominating Committee assembled no later than April to provide for enough time to work on Section succession. Each member of the Section Nominating Committee, including the immediate Section Chair, shall serve a one-year term.

Duties: The Section Nominating Committee shall prepare a slate for each elected Section leadership position from among responses to an open call to all voting members of the Section and present the slate to the Section Coordinating Team for approval.

Chapter Organization

Structure: Chapters may be established according to geographic area. Chapters may be formed by the Section Coordinating Team or upon written request of ten voting members of the Section. Each Chapter shall function under the jurisdiction of the Section which established it. For voting purposes, each AWHONN member shall be a member of a Chapter if his/her address in AWHONN records is within the Chapter's area.

Duties: Each Chapter shall, among other functions:

- Support implementation of AWHONN's strategic plan,
- Perform core program and fiscal functions as defined by the Board of Directors,
- Be responsible for leadership development and succession planning,
- Develop annual operating budgets and submit them to the Section, and
- Ensure compliance with AWHONN requirements and policies.

Chapter Leaders

Members interested in planning local educational activities to meet educational needs and those of other nurses who practice in women's health, obstetric, and neonatal nursing settings constitute the basis for Chapter organization. The Section elected leadership and Headquarters staff need to be kept apprised of formations of Chapters and Chapter leaders. Each Chapter shall function under the jurisdiction of the Section that established it.

Appointment and Eligibility: The Section Chair shall appoint a voting member of the Chapter as Chapter Coordinator. Chapter Coordinators may appoint other Chapter leaders as necessary to perform core program and fiscal functions as defined by the Board of Directors.

Term of Office: Each Chapter Coordinator shall serve a two-year term and be eligible for reappointment for a second two-year term. Terms shall begin on January 1 following the appointment.

Duties: Each Chapter Coordinator shall serve on the Section Coordinating Team and shall be responsible for submitting reports as required regarding Chapter program and fiscal activity.

Replacement: If for any reason, the Chapter Coordinator is unable to serve or fails to fulfill the duties of the office, the Section Chair shall appoint a replacement.

Election: Notwithstanding preceding a Section Chair appointment and term of office, if then 10 or more members of a Chapter timely petition the Section Chair, the Chapter shall be permitted to hold its own election for the Chapter Coordinator from amount the voting members of the chapter.



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