



# Special Interest Group (SIG) Manual

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## **Special Thanks for their assistance in producing the Special Interest Group Manual**

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# OVERVIEW

Established by the AWHONN Board of Directors in September 2022, Special Interest Groups (SIGs) were created to advance diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging among the membership. By providing a forum for members to connect, convene and collaborate around shared personal and professional identities, SIGs increase engagement and amplify the voices of members, especially those typically underrepresented in nursing. Examples of opportunities provided to SIGs include:

- Network with fellow AWHONN members
- Participate in interest-specific continuing professional development activities and events
- Deliver a unified message to AWHONN leadership and staff
- Provide recommendations on AWHONN policy, education, and research
- Pursue leadership roles within AWHONN
- Meet in person at AWHONN's Annual Convention
- Participate in online discussions and share ideas using the HUB
- Promote AWHONN membership to new members

The Special Interest Group (SIG) Manual is provided as a quick reference for SIG officers, members, and staff on how to establish and sustain a thriving SIG. For questions or comments regarding this resource please contact AWHONN staff at [sig@awhonn.org](mailto:sig@awhonn.org)

## Establishing and Maintaining a SIG

Special Interest Groups (SIG) are member-led and provide AWHONN members with volunteer leadership opportunities, professional development, and engagement opportunities throughout the year. Each group is led by volunteer members who will serve as the SIG's officers. *See the **SIG Officers** section for more information about these roles.*

## Submitting your Proposal for a New AWHONN Special Interest Group

1. The creation of a new SIG can be proposed by any AWHONN member. To propose a new SIG, members must first contact AWHONN via [sig@awhonn.org](mailto:sig@awhonn.org) and confirm that the proposed group supports AWHONN's mission and is not duplicative with other SIGs, initiatives, or committees.
2. Upon approval to move forward by the Board of Directors, a written proposal needs to be submitted to the DEI Committee, where it will be reviewed. A submission to establish a new SIG (see [Appendix A](#)) requires:
  - a. Name, title, affiliation and contact information of the main point of contact
  - b. Name, title, affiliation and contact information of the AWHONN members agreeing to serve as the SIG's initial Chair and Vice Chair
  - c. SIG topic name
  - d. Brief description of topic
  - e. How the new SIG supports AWHONN's mission
  - f. Why you believe AWHONN members would benefit from this Special Interest Group
  - g. List of 10 AWHONN members who support the formation of the proposed SIG
3. Once submitted, the proposal will be reviewed by the DEI Committee, which evaluates potential SIGs on a number of criteria, including:
  - a. Fit with AWHONN's vision and mission
  - b. Interest in topic expressed by AWHONN members
  - c. Lack of redundancy in topics covered by existing SIGs
  - d. Availability of adequate resources to help maintain SIG activities
  - e. Likelihood of long-term sustainability

4. The DEI Committee will then make a recommendation to the Board of Directors to approve the proposed SIG and the final decision will be communicated to the submitting member via email.
  - a. If approved, the proposed SIG becomes a provisional SIG for up to two years.
  - b. If not approved, the member(s) proposing the SIG will be advised that the SIG was not accepted and provided with feedback regarding the specific reasons. The member(s) may then refine or adjust the proposed topic and resubmit. Only one resubmission will be allowed every five years.
5. If at any point a SIG is unable to sustain itself with volunteer leadership (i.e., members do not volunteer to serve as a SIG officer) and AWHONN staff has made a concerted effort to recruit volunteer leaders, the SIG may be discontinued and removed from the AWHONN website. All registered members will be informed the SIG is no longer operational due to the lack of engagement.

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## AWHONN SUPPORT FOR SIGS

Upon approval and while an active SIG (including those in provisional status), the SIG will receive the following support from AWHONN:

- Listed on the AWHONN website
- Advertised in AWHONN communications
- Dedicated meeting space at the Annual Convention
- Online community on the AWHONN HUB
- SIG Manual providing guidance on how to operate the SIG throughout the year

### Re-evaluation/Discontinuation of a SIG

To remain operational, SIGs must have volunteer leadership in place to lead the group, establish an agenda for the year and convene either the SIG Officers or the entire SIG (via phone, webinar, or in-person meeting) at least annually. As the SIG evolves the topic must remain aligned with AWHONN's mission to remain an active SIG.

SIGs will also be evaluated based on activity. If a SIG has not offered any programs or engagement within a two-year period, the SIG will be discontinued.

### Moving from Provisional to Permanent SIG Status

Once a provisional SIG has been active for two years, the DEI Committee will review the SIG to make sure that (a) members are still engaged and involved; (b) the SIG has been able to sustain itself with volunteer leadership; and (c) the SIG still meets the requirements of aligning with AWHONN's mission. If these conditions are met, the provisional SIG will convert into a permanent SIG.

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## SIG OFFICERS

The SIG officers, at a minimum, must consist of the Chair and Vice Chair. Additional officers may be elected after the SIG is established. Examples of additional elected positions include Co-Chair, Co-Vice Chair, Secretary, Student Representative, Senior Advisor, etc. Elected officers must be in the Active membership category for the term of service with the exception of the Student Representatives. The responsibilities of each officer are as follows:

## Appointments

The roles of SIG Chair and Vice Chair will be filled as part of the annual Call for Volunteers. Chairs commit to serving at minimum a one-year term, with the option to be reappointed for up to four consecutive years. Officers for the first year of a SIG's existence will be those named on the application submitted for SIG establishment. Appointments run January 1 to December 31 of the following year.

It is permissible for a SIG to have additional officer positions; however, the positions of Chair and Vice Chair must be maintained. All roles require a position description and AWHONN Staff should be notified of any additional positions established for a SIG.

## Expectations

Officers from all SIGs are invited to convene annually at the Leadership Development Conference in January. SIG members are invited to convene annually at the Annual Convention in June.

SIGs are member-driven entities with oversight from the DEI Committee. All requests for research, policy recommendations, continuing education activities, etc. must be submitted to the overseeing committee for consideration and/or approval by the Board of Directors.

## Chair

The SIG Chair serves as the stimulus for ideas and inspiration for SIG activities on issues of interest to the group. This individual should be familiar with AWHONN's existing mission and structure. The SIG Chair is a volunteer position serving for a one-year term with the option to be re-elected. Co-Chairs are permissible and at the discretion of each SIG. Responsibilities include:

- Ensures regular activity and discussions among SIG members to include, at minimum, one monthly post on the HUB
- Establishes SIG meeting agenda with input, as appropriate, from members and staff
- Leads SIG meetings and calls
- Emails or posts meeting agendas and background material to participants advance of upcoming meetings
- Monitors activity in the community and takes appropriate action to ensure community members are operating within the terms of the [Social Media Code of Conduct](#)
- Maintains communication as needed regarding updates, changes and actions of the SIG with the Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Prepares and submits the annual SIG report

## Vice Chair

The SIG Vice Chair works with the SIG Chair to develop ideas and inspire conversation and activity within the SIG membership. This individual should be familiar with AWHONN's existing mission and structure. Responsibilities include:

- Participates in SIG meetings and conversations
- Serves as the leader in the Chair's absence
- Develops and posts meeting summaries to the SIG's HUB within 30 working days
- Assists the SIG Chair with preparation of the annual report

## Other Relevant Officer Positions

After the establishment of a SIG, other Officer positions may be established as deemed necessary by the SIG. These positions include but are not limited to Co-Chair, Co-Vice Chair, Secretary, Student Representative, Senior Advisor, etc. When a new officer position is deemed necessary by the SIG, the Chair and Vice Chair will collaborate with the Vice President of DEI to develop the position's expected responsibilities.

## SIG Meetings

The protocol for SIG meetings is as follows:

- All event dates must be provided to members a minimum of 60 days prior to the occasion. These dates can be communicated on the HUB.
- Meeting space is provided for each SIG during the AWHONN Annual Convention. SIG meeting times will be arranged by AWHONN staff and published in the Convention program, listed on the Convention webpage, and in the Convention mobile app.
  - o Should the SIG desire to formally meet face-to-face at other venues, such as the Leadership Conference, the SIG membership must agree to the meeting in advance and request permission from AWHONN Staff. The meeting must be requested no less than 180 days prior to the start of the corresponding conference.
- Ribbons for SIGs will be made available to members.
- The SIG Chair is responsible for establishing and posting all meeting agendas using the provided meeting agenda template (*appendix\*\**).
- The SIG Vice Chair is responsible for keeping minutes and posting them to the SIG's HUB using the provided meeting minutes template (*appendix\*\**).
- Should the SIG feel it necessary to conduct business via conference call or webinar, the SIG Chair is responsible for coordinating the call/webinar set-up. (*Does this need to be coordinated with anyone from AWHONN or can we provide a step-by-step guide on how they can do this?*) The meeting information should be available to the SIG members a minimum of 30 days prior to the meeting date.

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# PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT AGREEMENT

## Overview

When interacting with other AWHONN members, Coordinators should always present themselves as approachable, non-threatening, open-minded, inspiring, knowledgeable, and encouraging. When uncomfortable situations arise and powerful emotions such as defensiveness, shame and fear emerge, Coordinators should proactively avoid reinforcing these feelings and openly address the discomfort, which can help enrich the overall member experience.

## Codes of Conduct

Professionalism is the standard of conduct for everyone at AWHONN. The foundation for AWHONN's culture of professionalism is rooted in the core values in place for those who work for and represent AWHONN. Each member of the AWHONN community has a responsibility to act with integrity, compassion, and respect toward one another and those we serve. Honoring this responsibility and being accountable constitute the essence of professionalism. AWHONN expects its volunteer members to meet high ethical standards and to personify the high ideals represented by the organization. As an extension of AWHONN, volunteers are viewed as AWHONN representatives and commit to the following:

- Treat everyone equally and with respect, regardless of age, gender, role, race, level of education, or professional experience.
- Never talk down to a colleague, treat them in a condescending manner, or make them feel less important than anyone else.
- Consistently practice respectful, positive, and intentional etiquette when communicating in person and virtually
- When conflicts, issues, or disagreements arise involving colleagues' attitudes, behavior, or performance, speak directly to the individual first to address the concern in timely manner. If the issue is not resolved after speaking 1:1, report the issue to the VP of DEI with the intent to resolve in a respectful manner.

- Respect the expertise and autonomy of a colleague's expertise and never cut off, over speak, or marginalize a colleague.
- When issues arise, ask questions to gain a better understanding of the issue and avoid making negative assumptions.
- Be always professional and aware of your voice, tone, and body language. Avoid eye rolling, macro-aggressions and microaggressions.
- Provide feedback that fosters a culture of continuous improvement and accept feedback from others with a good attitude, knowing that we are all on the same path toward continuous improvement.

## Conflict of Interest

AWHONN recognizes that talented and energetic people often are called upon by various organizations to perform many roles. Thus, actual or potential conflicts of interest often arise, without the fault of the person. However, both individuals and organizations have obligations to address these conflicts of interest in a forthright and proper manner.

A potential or actual conflict of interest exists if an AWHONN officer, or director; advisory panel, committee, or task force member; section or chapter leader; employee, instructor, consultant, or other appointee ("AWHONN Personnel") might reasonably lack objectivity in their decision making or performance for AWHONN, because of any personal, professional, financial or other interest or relationship they have. A non-exhaustive list of the kinds of situations which can give rise to conflicts of interest include situations in which:

1. AWHONN Personnel serve as officers or board members for other professional associations whose policies or goals may diverge from those of AWHONN.
2. AWHONN Personnel are offered personal business opportunities which might otherwise be opportunities of AWHONN or are asked to make decisions for AWHONN on business opportunities that might otherwise become their own personal opportunities (such as contracting to prepare a book or monograph).
3. AWHONN Personnel are involved in businesses that compete with AWHONN.
4. AWHONN Personnel desire to contract to provide goods or services to AWHONN.
5. AWHONN Personnel are asked to make decisions for AWHONN with respect to dealings with persons with whom they have substantial personal, professional, financial, or other relationships.

Total avoidance of any potential conflict of interest, however remote or tenuous, is not a realistic goal. However, it is the responsibility of all persons in their AWHONN roles: (1) to disclose and raise for consideration any significant potential or actual conflict of interest, (2) to avoid any significant actual conflict of interest, and (3) to abide by decisions that are made by the designated AWHONN authorities (Chief Executive Officer or board of directors) concerning such matters.

If any AWHONN Personnel believe that a conflict of interest may arise or exist with respect to themselves or another person, at the earliest possible date they should disclose the relevant facts of the situation to (a) the Chief Executive Officer in the case of the president, an advisory panel, committee or task force member; section or chapter leader; employee; instructor; consultant; or other appointee, or (b) the president, in the case of the Chief Executive Officer, an officer or director.

The matter shall be resolved by the Chief Executive Officer or the board (by majority vote) as the case may be.

If an appropriate set of conditions for accommodating the potentially conflicting activity cannot be agreed upon, the AWHONN Personnel will be asked to refrain from the activity. Refusal or failure to abide by a decision regarding a significant conflict of interest may result in sanctions to an employee (consistent with AWHONN's employment policies), or to other AWHONN Personnel (consistent with AWHONN's Bylaws).

Any time an advisory panel, committee or task force member, board member, or officer of AWHONN becomes aware of a possible conflict of interest relating to a matter raised for discussion at a meeting, she or he should promptly disclose the potential conflict on the record and abstain from all discussions and votes on the matter(s) in question. Conflicts concerning section or chapter personnel should be resolved by analogous procedures.

An appropriate level of confidentiality shall be accorded to information developed in the course of review of potential conflicts of interest, and disclosures of such confidential information should only be made to the extent needed to resolve the matter or properly to conduct Association business.

### Loyalty and Confidentiality

Consistent with law and recognized practice of non-profit organizations, AWHONN Personnel are obligated to respect their duties of loyalty and confidentiality. In the course of their work, they may become aware of confidential or proprietary information of AWHONN. This may relate to matters such as, but not limited to, AWHONN finances, legal matters, businesses, programs or plans, publications, employee matters, relations with other organizations, membership lists or sponsor lists. Persons may use such information only in order to perform their AWHONN roles. They may not, during or after performing their roles within AWHONN, use that information for their own advantage, or disclose it to others without the explicit written authorization of AWHONN. In addition, unless there is a written agreement to the contrary, all reports or material written for AWHONN remain its property.

### Assignment of Copyright

I understand that in the course of my work as AWHONN Personnel, documents may be produced by me (or a group of which I am a member) in the course of the appointment and that these documents in draft and final form are works for hire or are otherwise the property of the Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN). Further, in consideration of my being an elected or appointed member as noted above, I hereby assign to AWHONN the ownership of copyright in such works, whether published or unpublished. I further agree upon request to execute such specific assignments or instruments and take any action necessary to enable AWHONN to secure its copyright.



# APPENDIX A: SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP REQUEST FORM

## APPLICATION: NEW SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP PROPOSAL

Point of Contact (full name) \_\_\_\_\_  
 AWHONN Member # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Organization \_\_\_\_\_  
 Position/Title \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed Special Interest Group Topic:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Brief Description of the SIG Topic (max 200 words):  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

How does the new SIG support AWHONN's mission (max 200 words)?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Who would benefit from the creation of this SIG?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

	Name	Organization	Email	AWHONN Member #
Chair				
Vice Chair				