

How Can We Improve the AAA Election Process?

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Anthropologists spend a lot of time asking “What’s going on?” to figure out the culture of a community or organization. We need to direct that question to you, as AAA members, to help explain and address two key issues with the AAA election process: voter turnout and number of candidates.

The spring 2019 election has been certified; the winners will take office at the end of the AAA Annual Meeting in November. This year *only 18 percent* of the membership voted over a six-week voting period despite the ease of voting online and repeated efforts by AAA staff to bring attention to the voting process.

AAA also has recurring difficulty finding members willing to run for open positions on the Executive Board and various committees. When the nominations process begins in early fall, it often feels like searching for a needle in a haystack.

So, we are asking you to enlighten all of us: What’s going on with the culture of nominations and voting at AAA?

What could we do to encourage more interest in leadership positions at the AAA and a higher voter turnout at election time?

Civic engagement at AAA involves a well-crafted process that starts with the Nominations Committee. This permanent committee is led by the AAA secretary and has 10 elected members who represent cultural, linguistic, biological, and practicing/professional anthropology, and archaeology, and also includes a minority and three undesignated seats. The committee starts its work in late summer, reaching out through the Association and through all the sections to encourage and invite members to nominate themselves for one or more positions. Some AAA sections actively participate by having a designated committee whose responsibility is to identify potential candidates, urge them to apply, and write letters of endorsement.

Once the nominations process closes, the AAA Nominations Committee organizes candidate slates for all open positions: AAA officers, the Executive Board, the Nominations Committee itself, and the Members Programmatic Advisory and Advocacy Committee.

The AAA Nominations Committee adheres to the following process: First, every member reviews all applications and considers the most equitable way to pair candidates based on gender, ethnicity/race, work experience, subdiscipline representation, and prior leadership experience. Second, the Committee meets the day before the Annual Meeting for a full day of work in which the slates for all open positions are finalized. Members consider potential slates carefully in an attempt to select a robust and representative group of candidates. Only two individuals can be selected as nominees for each open position. Third, the Committee sends a final recommendation for all the slates to the Executive Board.

The nominations process has been refined and improved over the years. While it is a fair and effective process, the Committee is always open to new suggestions to make the process stronger.

What could we do to encourage more interest in leadership positions at the AAA and a higher voter turnout at election time? We hope that this article generates a broader discussion of AAA elections among the membership. We welcome further discussion of elections on our Communities platform and are happy to address any questions or concerns members may have. Let's make a concerted effort to increase voter turnout and candidates for office during the next election cycle.

The AAA Nominations Committee is seeking nominations for nine leadership positions for the 2020 elections. See the [nominations and elections page on the AAA website](#) for more information and to access the online application form.

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