GWAA Board of Directors Frequently Asked Questions

Below are some frequently asked questions about the GWAA Board of Directors. Please feel free to also read through the Bylaws of The George Washington Alumni Association.

About the GWAA

What is the GWAA’s mission and goals?
The George Washington Alumni Association (GWAA) was created as an organization to represent the interests of alumni of The George Washington University. Our mission is to facilitate supportive engagement between the university and its graduates. In support of this purpose, the GWAA is committed to three primary goals:

- Creating a worldwide community among the alumni body and facilitating opportunities for lifelong engagement with the university;
- Representing the interests of the alumni body by gathering a voice for alumni and facilitating communication with the university;
- Creating a culture of philanthropy among the alumni body, to ensure that alumni continue to contribute their time, talent and financial resources to the betterment of the university.

How does the GWAA relate to the University? What is the difference between the GWAA and the GW Office of Alumni Relations?
The George Washington Alumni Association (GWAA) is a separately incorporated nonprofit corporation (tax-exempt organization with its own 501(c)(3) status), formed to represent the interests of university alumni. The GWAA is managed entirely by alumni volunteers; it has no paid staff. The GWAA works collaboratively with university staff to shape the direction of programming and services for alumni, and serves as an advisory group to the university with regard to alumni engagement. As needed, the GWAA advocates with the university on issues of interest to the university’s graduates.

The GW Office of Alumni Relations (OAR) is an operational unit of the university, housed in the Division of Development and Alumni Relations. It is operated by professional staff, working under the direction of the Associate Vice President for Alumni Relations and Development. OAR staff members are responsible for executing all alumni programming at the university, and also provide staff support to the GWAA Board of Directors.

Does the GWAA have its own finances?
Yes, as a separately incorporated organization, the GWAA maintains a financial structure independent of the university. Revenues are earned from affinity marketing agreements between the GWAA and various corporations offering products and services of benefit to GW alumni. Under the terms of a memorandum of understanding established in collaborative partnership between the GWAA and the university, these funds are dedicated to the Association’s use. The GWAA expends funds each year to support programming for GW alumni. In addition to an annual contribution to the university to support alumni programs such as Alumni Weekend, the GWAA also grants funds to alumni affinity groups and informal groups of alumni to support programming that benefits alumni. The GWAA also actively supports the
university philanthropically by making an annual contribution to student financial aid and other occasional initiatives. The GWAA maintains a reserve fund that is managed by the Finance Committee of the GWAA Board of Directors.

**Qualifications for Members-at-Large**

*What is the term for a Member-at-Large of the GWAA Board of Directors? Is there a term limit?*

Members-at-Large of the GWAA Board of Directors serve for a term of three (3) years. The term begins at the Annual Meeting of the Association, held in June. Members-at-Large are limited to two (2) terms, for a total of six (6) years of service. Members-at-Large wishing to continue their service for a second three-year term must reapply upon completion of their first term.

*What are you looking for in a member of the GWAA Board of Directors?*

The GWAA Board of Directors is looking for alumni volunteers with a passion for contributing in multiple ways to the GW alumni community. We seek a diverse board that can represent the interests of all GW alumni, regardless of their school affiliation, class year, geographic location or other factors. Ideal board candidates should be:

- A passionate advocate for GW, willing to share their alumni experience with other alumni, students, prospective students, and others;
- A dedicated volunteer, willing to devote time to participation in board meetings, committee meetings, and alumni events or other programs for alumni;
- An inquisitive spirit, willing to constructively ask questions and challenge the university when appropriate to best represent the interests of alumni;
- A financial supporter, willing to make an annual contribution to the university and lead others by example;
- A skilled volunteer, willing to share expertise with the association and other board members;
- A creative thinker, willing to develop new ideas for engaging with alumni and lend support to the implementation of those ideas.

*Are there any special skill sets that you look for GWAA board members to have?*

While we are most interested in ensuring that board members are passionate advocates for the university and its alumni, we are also continually looking for expertise that can help improve how the GWAA accomplishes its mission. Specific skill sets of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Volunteer leadership and board participation – those who have served on other volunteer boards or in other leadership roles
- Financial management – those who have expertise in managing and investing funds
- Communications – those adept at developing messages and strategies for sharing information with audiences

*What if I’ve never served on a volunteer board before?*

While we are interested in candidates with prior experience on volunteer boards, it is not required.

*What if I’ve never been involved in GW alumni activities before?*

The GWAA Board of Directors is interested in incorporating a variety of perspectives on the board, but in
general, the board seeks members who have previously demonstrated their commitment to GW by participating in alumni (or student) programming. Alumni looking to begin their volunteer service with GW are encouraged to consider the wide variety of options outside of full GWAA board membership. These include joining a board committee, participating in a regional club, attending events, serving in the Alumni Admissions program, providing career guidance to students, and many other programs.

Diversity

*What is the GWAA’s policy with regard to diversity on its board of directors?*

The GWAA is committed to ensuring that our Board of Directors adequately represents the diverse characteristics of the entire GW alumni community. To that end, the Board adopted the following policy as part of its [Bylaws](#):

> The GWAA is committed to inclusion of all alumni constituencies in furtherance of [its] goals. To that end, the GWAA Board of Directors shall endeavor at all times to reflect the diversity of the alumni body with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, culture, age, geography, academic training, profession, and affinity group involvement.

*How do you define “diversity?”*

We consider “diversity” in its very broadest sense. Beyond the traditional understanding of “diverse” candidates representing various races, ethnicities and gender, we look at other factors such as class year, school affiliation, geographic location, profession, skill set, and engagement in alumni activities.

*Do you have quotas to fill certain numbers of seats on the board with diverse candidates?*

No – the GWAA does not specify quotas for any seats on its board of directors, with the exception of designating one seat for each degree-granting school or college of the university. Rather, we endeavor when selecting Members-at-Large to select candidates across all of the categories of diversity to ensure a balanced board that is able to credibly represent the interests of all alumni.

*I don’t live in the DC area. Can I still participate in the GWAA Board of Directors?*

Yes, absolutely. Many of our board members live outside of the Washington, DC region. In fact, we actively encourage those living in other states or countries to consider joining the board, as approximately 60 percent of GW’s alumni population resides outside the Washington area. It is important to note that all board members are required to attend a minimum of one board meeting in person per year.

*Are you looking for alumni from any particular geographic area?*

No, not specifically. We do tend to place more emphasis on including candidates outside the DC region, but we do not specifically allocate seats to any particular geographic area. Many of our non-Washington board members tend to come from the Eastern region of the United States (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania), so we are especially interested in seeing applicants from other parts of the country and even more so in those who reside outside the United States.

*I just graduated recently. Am I qualified to join the Board of Directors?*

There is no minimum age or required number of years since graduation to serve on the GWAA Board of Directors. We are very interested in ensuring that the voice of young alumni is represented on the board. Recognizing that most recent graduates will not have extensive professional skills to offer or a long
record of volunteer service, we look at activities and volunteerism while serving as a student at GW to identify young alumni candidates for the GWAA board.

**What are “alumni affinity groups” and why are they important?**
Alumni affinity groups are groups of alumni who gather together around a common characteristic or area of interest. As opposed to traditional alumni organizations that typically organize around a particular school or college, these groups tend to develop more spontaneously and sometimes without professional support from the university. As these groups are an important element of the GW alumni community and offer unique and engaging programming for alumni, the GWAA board of directors is committed to ensuring their success and to helping them share information with each other. We seek active volunteers from alumni affinity groups to join the board of directors so that they may help bring together the overall alumni community and help us identify ways to ensure their success.

**Expectations**

**What are the primary expectations for members of the GWAA Board of Directors?**
Members of the GWAA Board of Directors are expected to do the following:

- Actively participate in meetings of the board of directors and its committees, ideally in person
- Make an annual financial contribution to the university
- Participate in university events and programs, whether on campus in Washington or in the board member’s local area

**Why do you require board members to make an annual financial gift to GW?**
One of the GWAA’s primary goals is to “create a culture of philanthropy” among GW alumni. The university is very dependent on philanthropic support to educate the next generation of leaders; tuition and fees aren’t nearly enough to fund the university’s operations. The board of directors plays a key role in helping spread the word to all GW alumni that their financial support is needed.

We also require financial support to help establish credibility with the university community. The GWAA is meant to be the voice of alumni on campus. When that voice is backed up by giving from 100 percent of the board of directors, it carries more weight.

**I don’t have a lot of money to contribute. Does this mean I can’t serve on the board?**
No, not at all. We recognize that everyone has different financial circumstances and may not be able to make large financial gifts to the university. While we do encourage members of the GWAA Board of Directors to contribute at a leadership level, we are far more interested in ensuring that board members make a contribution each year, regardless of amount. Our goal is to ensure that 100 percent of the board gives each year, not to reach a specific dollar amount.

**Do I need to be a Luther Rice Society member to serve on the GWAA Board of Directors?**
No. We do encourage members of the GWAA Board of Directors to make leadership-level gifts and therefore become members of the Luther Rice Society, but it is not required. (Membership in the Luther Rice Society is granted to those who contribute $1,000 or more each year for alumni who graduated 10 or more years ago; $500 or more for those within 6-9 years of graduation; and $250 or more for those who graduated five or fewer years ago.)
Can I specify what my financial gift is used for?
Yes, absolutely. Your gift to GW may be designated for a wide variety of purposes. Popular choices include designating to a particular college or school, to support student financial aid, to fund a particular activity or student organization, or to support athletic programs.

What can I do to participate in alumni activities if I don’t live in the Washington, DC area?
GW hosts a wide variety of programs and events for alumni outside the DC region. The Office of Alumni Relations works with alumni volunteers in many areas to establish alumni chapters that host local events (See a current list of regional chapters at alumni.gwu.edu/community). OAR staff members also assist board members with starting new chapters or connecting with other local alumni. The Alumni Admissions Program works with alumni to represent GW at student fairs and connect with prospective students. The Career Advisor Network is available to all alumni, regardless of region. And there are many others.

Will I be paid for service on the board of directors?
As a nonprofit organization, the Bylaws of the Association prohibit compensation to alumni who serve on the board of directors.

Board Structure & Meetings

How many members does the GWAA Board of Directors have? How is the board structured?
The size of the GWAA Board of Directors varies slightly from year to year. The Bylaws specify that the board shall consist of between 60 and 70 members. The board includes the following members:

- Officers of the Association, including president, president-elect (or immediate past president, depending on the year), vice president for financial affairs and treasurer, and secretary;
- Vice presidents of the Association (the vice presidents serve as chairs of the committees);
- One designated representative from each of the degree-granting schools and colleges of the university appointed by the school or college (there are currently 10 schools and colleges);
- One designated representative from the former Mount Vernon College and Seminary;
- One faculty representative;
- Five Alumni Trustees (alumni who are nominated to serve on the GW Board of Trustees) and two Recent Alumni Trustees (Alumni Trustees who graduated within five years of election);
- One student representative (Student Association president or designee);
- Between 30 and 40 Members-at-Large.

All members of the Board of Directors have equal power to vote on any matters brought before the board. It is important to note that all members (except Alumni Trustees) are also required to participate in one or more committees of the board.

How many Members-at-Large does the GWAA elect every year?
The GWAA elects between 10 and 14 Members-at-Large to the Board of Directors each year. The specific number is decided each year based on the number of vacancies created by members finishing their terms, as well as the number and quality of applicants.
What is the time commitment for members of the GWAA Board of Directors?
At a minimum, members of the board of directors are expected to commit to the following:

- Participation in all meetings of the board;
- Participation in board committee meetings;
- Participation in campus events or regional alumni activities.

Board members often find other ways to engage with the alumni community and are encouraged to make an effort to connect with other alumni while serving on the board.

How often does the board of directors meet?
The board typically meets as a full board four times per year: a full-day business meeting in the fall and the spring (usually held on a Saturday in the fall and a Friday in the spring), a full-day retreat in the summer (typically held on a Saturday), and the Annual Meeting of the Association (held on a weekday evening in June). While the Bylaws do provide for a way to call additional board meetings, this rarely occurs. Interim business that must be addressed by the board before a regular meeting is typically handled by e-mail or teleconference.

What happens at board meetings?
The regular agenda for board meetings includes committee meetings, presentations from university officials about topics of interest to the board, break-out discussions on current issues, reports from the officers and committees of the board, and updates from the Office of Alumni Relations. Board members are encouraged to share their ideas for topics addressed at future meetings.

What if I can’t attend a board meeting in person? Is there a way for me to still participate?
Teleconference capabilities are set up for every meeting of the board, as well as for committee meetings. Alumni who cannot travel to Washington for a particular meeting are welcome to participate by telephone. The Bylaws require, however, that every board member participate in person at a meeting of the board at least once per year.

Can I join every meeting by teleconference?
Teleconference capabilities are offered for every meeting of the board. However, board members are required to attend at least one meeting of the board in person each year.

What happens if I miss too many meetings?
Members of the board who fail to attend three consecutive meetings, or who fail to participate in at least one meeting in person each year without prior approval from the president, are determined to have resigned from the board and their seat will become vacant. This is done at the discretion of the president, and extenuating circumstances are considered before declaring a board seat vacant.

Will I be reimbursed for travel expenses to participate in board meetings?
The GWAA does not reimburse its board members or provide any type of financial compensation for service on the board. Board members are encouraged to consult with a tax professional about whether their travel expenses for board meetings may be tax-deductible.
Committees

What are the committees on the GWAA Board of Directors? What do they do?
The board of directors conducts much of its business through its committees, including:

- **Executive Committee** – comprised of the Officers of the Association, Vice Presidents, and two designees by the President, this committee sets the overall strategic direction for the Association and acts for the Board of Directors on any matters requiring action between board meetings.
- **Finance Committee** – chaired by the Vice President for Financial Affairs and Treasurer, this committee establishes the annual budget, manages the Association’s financial investments, establishes investment policies, advises the Association on revenue sources and assists in identifying sponsorships. Membership is limited to five board members and one non-board member.
- **Nominations Committee** – chaired by a Vice President, this committee manages the process of nominating candidates for Alumni Trustee, as well as members of the Board of Directors and Officers of the Association. Membership in this committee is limited to board members.
- **Student-Alumni Initiatives Committee** – chaired by a Vice President, this committee focuses on creating innovative programs to further interaction between students and alumni of the university. Membership in this committee is open to all alumni, not just board members.
- **Awards Committee** – chaired by a Vice President, this committee receives nominations and recommends recipients to the Board of Directors for the Alumni Outstanding Service Award and the Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award. Membership on this committee is limited to board members.
- **Communications Committee** – chaired by a Vice President, this committee advises the Office of Alumni Relations and the GWAA on effective communications with and between alumni. Membership on this committee is open to all alumni, not just board members.
- **Career Services Committee** – chaired by a Vice President, this committee advises the university on how to provide career-related programming for alumni, including networking, career guidance, student recruitment and transition planning. Membership on this committee is open to all alumni, not just board members.

**Are board members required to join a committee?**
All members of the board of directors—except for Alumni Trustees and Recent Alumni Trustees—are required to serve on at least one committee of the board.

**Can I participate in more than one committee?**
Yes, board members may participate on more than one committee. However, most committees meet during the same time period on days when the board of directors meets, so it may be difficult to effectively contribute to two or more committees at the same time. It is recommended that board members focus their effort on one committee each year.

**How are board members assigned to committees?**
The Association President selects the members of each committee. Each year, following the Annual Meeting when new board members are elected, all board members are asked to indicate their top three
preferences for committee membership. These preferences are reviewed by the committee chairs and the President appoints committee members upon recommendation from the committee chairs.

*Can I change committees during my term as Member-at-Large?*
Yes. All board members are asked to indicate their committee membership preferences each year, so it is possible to change committee assignments from year to year.

*When do committees meet?*
Committees meet at least three times per year, during the board’s summer retreat and fall and spring business meetings. Most committees also hold interim meetings, either in person or by teleconference, to conduct business throughout the year. Committee meeting schedules are determined by the chair of each committee.

**Nominations Process**

*Who decides which alumni can serve on the GWAA Board of Directors?*
Most members of the Board of Directors are elected by alumni of the university at the Annual Meeting of the Association. Officers and Members-at-Large are nominated for election at the Annual Meeting by the Nominations Committee.

*How do I apply for the Board of Directors?*
Alumni wishing to apply for a seat on the board of directors as an Officer or Member-at-Large may apply by completing the online form on the GW Alumni website (http://alumni.gwu.edu/board-directors-nominations).

*When are board applications due?*
The deadline for applications for Officer and Member-at-Large of the Association is determined each year by the Nominations Committee. This year, all applications are due on **February 6, 2015**.

*What happens after I apply?*
Once all applications have been received, they are reviewed by the Nominations Committee. The Committee considers the current needs of the Association and then selects candidates for positions to best meet those needs in a two-phase process. First, the Committee reviews all written applications and narrows the group of candidates down based on the information provided in the applications. The Committee will then conduct interviews with this group of candidates and make a final selection of candidates to nominate.

*Will I be interviewed for the Member-at-Large position?*
Interviews are conducted at the discretion of the Nominations Committee, and in deference to all candidates, are held in confidence. The Committee will generally conduct interviews with all candidates that it chooses to nominate. Candidates who are not chosen for an interview will be informed by the Nominations Committee once the group of interviewees has been selected.

*When will I find out if I’ve been nominated for election to Member-at-Large?*
Once the Nominations Committee has selected a group of candidates that it would like to interview, all candidates will be contacted and informed that either, (a) the Committee wishes to conduct an interview with the candidate, or (b) the Committee has decided not to interview and therefore the candidate will not
be nominated to serve on the board. Once the Committee has conducted interviews and selected its final slate of nominees for Member-at-Large, members of the committee will contact all candidates who were interviewed, either by telephone or email. This typically happens several weeks before the Annual Meeting in June. In 2015, we expect to inform applicants in late April.

If nominated, when am I elected to the Member-at-Large position?
If nominated by the Nominations Committee, you would be elected by vote of the Association at the Annual Meeting in June. The 2015 Annual Meeting occurs on June 4 2015.

When would my term begin?
Terms of office for all board members begin immediately at the Annual Meeting when elected. Board members elected this year will begin service on June 6, 2015 and serve until the Annual Meeting in June 2018.

Would I be expected to attend the Annual Meeting?
The Annual Meeting of the Association is open to all alumni. Alumni who have been nominated for service on the board of directors will be invited to the Annual Meeting when they are notified of their nomination in late May, and are encouraged to attend.

If I’m not nominated, how will I be told?
All applicants for Officer or Member-at-Large of the board of directors will be personally contacted by a member of the Nominations Committee, likely by telephone. If the Committee is unable to reach you by phone, you will receive an email notification from the chair of the committee.

If I’m not nominated, what else can I do to get involved with GW alumni activities?
The GWAA Board of Directors is one of many opportunities to engage with alumni programs at GW. We encourage you to consider getting involved with a school-based alumni association or an alumni affinity group, joining the GW Career Advisor Network or Alumni Admissions Program, or joining one of the board of directors committees that is open to non-board members (they include the Career Services, Communications, and Student-Alumni Initiatives Committees, as well as other ad-hoc committees and task forces established by the board.) All applicants who are not nominated to serve on the board of directors will be contacted by a member of the Nominations Committee to discuss other opportunities to volunteer their service to GW.

Who can I contact with on other questions?
If you have questions about serving on the GWAA Board of Directors that are not addressed here, please contact the Office of Alumni Relations:

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