

**Association of **Alt**ernative Newsmedia**

**GUIDANCE DOCUMENT**

*Authored by the AAN Board of Directors*

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## **References and Additional Resources**

AAN materials that are referenced herein and/or offered as a further resource include:

[AAN's Mission Statement](#)

[Bylaws of the Association of Alternative Newsmedia](#)

[Code of Conduct](#)

[AAN Publications](#)

[AAN Membership](#)

[Board of Directors](#)

### **1. How We Communicate & Handle Grievances**

*“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” — George Bernard Shaw*

These are general guidelines for communication among people involved with AAN. This exists to orient new members, to provide guidance on how to best utilize AAN’s communication pathways, and to encourage member communication.

### *Association-wide updates*

Each week, AAN sends an email to all members with updates on resources, conference planning, industry news and opportunities, events, shoutouts and more. Have something you’d like to get into this newsletter? Email the association manager with a request.

### *Communication Pathways*

Outside of our annual conference, most association communication happens over email and in virtual meetings set up by the association manager. AAN encourages communication between members via the following email distribution lists:

- [publishers@lists.aan.org](mailto:publishers@lists.aan.org) – publishers and owners
- [editorial@lists.aan.org](mailto:editorial@lists.aan.org) – people with editorial roles at member publications
- [management@lists.aan.org](mailto:management@lists.aan.org) – people in management roles at member publications
- [design@lists.aan.org](mailto:design@lists.aan.org) – people in design and production roles at member publications

AAN also encourages member-to-member communication. A list of our members can be found [at this link](#), and individual emails can be gathered by emailing the association manager.

### *Board Communication*

To reach out to the board with a request, concern or suggestion, contact the association manager, although members are free to contact any board member directly.

### *Communicating Suggestions or Grievances*

Board members are encouraged to email suggestions for association support, programming, resources and more to the association manager or board president. For grievances regarding policies, programs, fees, the organization, the behavior of a member, the behavior of someone with a member publication, or a breach of the Code of Conduct, please see the “How We Manage Conflict” section of these guidelines.

### *Code of Conduct*

All communication with AAN members must be in compliance with our Code of Conduct. Should a conflict arise that may violate our Code of Conduct or go against these guidelines, please contact the association manager or board President, and include any documents or communications related to said conflict.

## **2. How We Consult**

In hospital consultation, three key words are “request, render and reply.” The AAN board should, in most cases, be involved with this process.

### *Request*

This is someone initiating a consult. The who, what, where, when, why, and how of the situation should be communicated. A consult can be initiated from any member of AAN, an individual representing a member, a board member, a staff member, or a vendor. Requests/consults can be positive or negative.

### *Rendering*

The next step is rendering—in this case, taking action on the request. If needed, a “file” should be opened where any actions are documented. This can include interviews, legal review, board review, staff review, kudos, etc.

### *Reply*

The final step is closing the loop on the initial request, to reply to the entity asking for a consult. This, too, should be documented, and shared with those parties involved in the process.

## **3. How We Make Decisions**

As often as possible, decisions are made collaboratively.

Staff and the board's executive committee should meet at regular intervals, and communicate via email/other electronic means on a regular basis.

Larger decisions are brought before the full board for a vote and documented in meeting minutes. Where required by bylaws, decisions are brought before the membership for a vote. In all cases, the good of the association as a whole comes before the good of any individual member, board member or individual associated with AAN.

### *Six-Step Decision-Making Process:*

#### *1. Understanding that a decision must be made*

The first step in making a decision is the realization that a decision is necessary. Decisions often revolve around problems or issues that arise, but can revolve around positive situations as well. The person bringing forward an issue must be clear and thorough in their communication. It is the individual's responsibility to bring it up to the appropriate decision-making body (committee, executive committee, full board).

#### *2. Honest, Straight-forward, Clear Communication and Comprehensive Data-Collection*

For proper decision-making and record-keeping, the information surrounding the decision must be communicated clearly and honestly. All information regarding the decision should be gathered and shared openly among the decision-makers.

### *3. Identify All Alternatives*

After information has been analyzed, different options regarding the decision must be developed.

### *4. Evaluate the Pros and Cons*

Each alternative should be analyzed for its pros and cons, to help identify the option(s) with the best chance of success or positive impact on the association.

### *5. Make the Decision*

When the decision is being made collaboratively, as is the practice for our most impactful decisions, the decision-making body must come to consensus or take a vote.

### *6. Follow Through With the Decision*

Once decisions are made, the collective moves forward in full support of the decision, despite differences in opinions about the decision. There should always be constant evaluation. Should someone feel strongly that the decision is not resulting in an anticipated or manageable outcome, then they should return to step 1.

### *Why do we do this?*

Our decisions today can affect the association in substantial ways for years to come. Making collaborative decisions ensures that we are considering multiple viewpoints, and that no one is making a decision out of self-interest. The responsibility of important decisions does not unfairly fall onto the shoulders of a single person. The good of the association always comes first, and a collaborative and thorough decision-making process helps ensure this.

## **4. How We Practice Inclusion and Diversity**

Because AAN is a multinational organization focused on promoting journalistic independence and speaking truth to power, we must make sure we are intentionally fostering diversity and inclusion, both within our organization and through our work. Our commitment to these values is unwavering. We know that having varied perspectives helps generate better stories to solve the complex problems of a changing—and increasingly diverse—world.

This includes making sure as many voices as possible are included in conversations, and that we're using a critical eye to ask when certain perspectives are being excluded. The appearance of diversity through representation is not enough.

Diversity always exists in social systems. Inclusion, on the other hand, must be created. In order to leverage diversity, an environment must be created where people feel supported, listened to and able to do their personal best. As an organization, we commit to fostering diversity at every level of the organization and in every business area.

Inclusion means that AAN is continually engaging with people of all different backgrounds, in terms of sexual orientation; gender identity; race; ethnicity; socioeconomic background; immigration status; physical, mental or developmental abilities; age; religion or belief; language; nationality or national origins; and other characteristics that make persons unique.

Everyone associated with AAN should also seek to be aware of their own unconscious and conscious bias, and know how to ensure these biases do not interfere with any interactions.

Our commitment to diversity and inclusion aligns with our values, and is reflected in our Code of Conduct.

Practically speaking, exemplifying diversity and inclusion as an organization involves the application of our practices and policies on organizational mobility, recruitment and selection for membership,

compensation and benefits for employees, professional development and training, any social and professional events including conferences, as well as suspensions or terminations of those who do not abide by these principles, as allowed in AAN's bylaws.

## **5. How We Manage Conflict**

The Association of Alternative Newsmedia exists to help its members grow and flourish. Accordingly, the association will work to promote editorial excellence among its members; facilitate access to information to enable member publications to raise their level of journalism and business performance; support the marketing and advertising efforts of member publications; increase awareness of the alternative media; and advocate the interests of the media industry.

From time to time, the board of directors may receive a complaint regarding policies, programs, fees, the organization, the behavior of a member, the behavior of an individual/individuals at a member publication, or a breach of the Code of Conduct by another member or an individual/individuals at a member publication. The conflicts or complaints could also concern staff, employees or volunteers. It is the intent of this policy to encourage members and employees to resolve conflicts and foster goodwill through direct dialogue whenever possible, before following formal resolution procedures.

### *Informal conflict resolution policy*

Individuals who find themselves in conflict with a staffer, board member or member representative should first attempt to talk directly to the person with whom they experience difficulty. They should give feedback directly to the individual before initiating a formal conflict-resolution process. This process involves the sharing of perceptions and experiences; the clarification of needs, desires and expectations; and the development of a mutually negotiated plan of action. The complainant should keep a record of the incident(s) and any related discussions. The details should be noted,

including when it happened, where it happened, who was involved, and any witnesses who may have seen or heard it.

If the complainant feels uncomfortable dealing directly with the issue, or if their efforts to do so are unsuccessful, they should bring any concerns to the [AAN association manager or the board president](#). If the complaint is against the president of the board, the matter can be brought to another member of the executive committee.

### *Formal internal conflict resolution process*

If the complainant wishes to initiate a complaint, they must put the issue in writing, by email or a written letter, indicating that it is to be considered as a formal complaint. The written complaint may be submitted to the AAN association manager or the board president. If the complaint is against the president of the board, the matter can be referred to another member of the [executive committee](#).

Complaints should be made as soon as possible, but no later than 30 days from the date of the incident(s). All efforts will be made to ensure that formal complaints are resolved in a timely manner.

The AAN executive director or association manager, or the board president, will interview the complainant, and notes will be taken. A copy of the interview notes will be reviewed and signed by the complainant, and each will retain a copy.

AAN's executive director or administrator, or the board president, will thoroughly investigate the complaint, including any necessary consultation with other employees/staff or directors/board members. At the conclusion of the formal investigation, a report will be reviewed by the board (without any members of the board directly involved in the incident which spurred the complaint) either at the next board meeting or at a special meeting. A response to the complainant will be provided within 2 weeks to 30 days, by email or a written letter, following the meeting at which the matter was discussed.

If the complaint is against another AAN member, or a representative of an AAN member, the member can respond to the complaint. The member has 2 weeks to respond once notified of the complaint and can do so by email or a written letter. The board will consider the member's response before making a final decision.

### *Disciplinary Action*

The board may pass a resolution authorizing disciplinary action, as dictated by AAN's bylaws and Code of Conduct. A member or individual at a member publication can appeal the decision of the board during a special board meeting, called within two weeks to 30 days after the notice to the member. If the appeal is not accepted, the board's decision will be final.

Any employee, contractor or board member who violates this policy and/or fails to take action when advised of a violation will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment, contract or board service. Disciplinary action will also be taken if a complaint is found to have been made fraudulently and with malicious intent.

### *Confidentiality*

All persons involved with a complaint must endeavor to ensure that the matter remains confidential. To this end, complaints shall be investigated both confidentially and objectively, with respect for the rights of all parties involved. Those conducting the investigation of a complaint should advise all persons interviewed that they will be expected to treat the matter as confidential, and that they may be disciplined if they breach confidentiality.

## **6. How We Practice Accountability**

The board of directors for AAN recognizes our responsibilities not only to our member papers but also to the individual members and our staff. We understand these responsibilities are integral to the success of the association, and our aim is to demonstrate our commitment to our actions and policies. We take all feedback that we receive from our members and staff seriously, and, where possible, maintain open dialogue to ensure we

adhere to the guidelines we have set forth as well as enable their continual development.

We shall:

- Operate an equal opportunity policy for all present and potential future board positions as well as association staff.
- Provide safeguards to ensure that all individuals are treated with respect and remain free from sexual, physical, or mental harassment.
- Strive to maintain clean, healthy, and safe environments for conferences, be they in-person or virtual.
- Maintain high professional standards for our staff and contract employees.
- Uphold the values of honesty, partnership, and fairness in our relationships with member organizations and individuals.

[Regular and affiliate members](#) also have a responsibility to the association, its board of directors, and its staff. these are equally as important to the success and continual development of the association.

*Members shall:*

- Strive to have representatives attend all scheduled meetings of the full membership as often as possible.
- Strive to participate in the association's annual meeting.
- Be respectful of the rights of all other members and consent to the Code of Conduct.
- Uphold the values of honesty, partnership, and fairness in their relationships with other member organizations and individuals. Assign at least one primary contact to be registered with the association.

- Be current on all membership dues.

## **7. For Not-Yet AAN Members**

In 2021, AAN membership passed a significant [bylaws](#) change removing the requirement that a regular member be a publication "of general interest and not a 'special interest publication.'"

This precluded, as the bylaws stated elsewhere, "niche publications, including but not limited to politics, sexuality, ethnic, arts, entertainment and culture" from becoming [Regular AAN members](#). Such publications can now apply for regular membership, which includes vetting by the Membership Committee, and approval from two-thirds of AAN members voting at the annual meeting.

The purpose of increasing our membership is to increase the participation and idea sharing amongst member publications with the intention of helping all of our members grow and flourish in their communities throughout North America and beyond.

- AAN members support one another by sharing ideas and solutions to problems many alternative media outlets face.
- Through our extensive application process, we promote editorial excellence among its members.
- With active listservs, annual conferences and webinars AAN facilitates access to information to enable member publications to raise their level of journalism and business performance.
- The AAN board serves to increase awareness of the alternative media and advocate the interests of the media industry.

To continue to serve our membership fully, the association must grow to include a diverse membership of community and locally committed publications, both for profit and nonprofit. Prospective members will lead to an increase of forward thinking, thought leaders who are ready to lead the survival of local news.