

American Historical Association

Oversight of *American Historical Review*

Purpose

This document aims to clarify the purpose and methods of oversight of the *American Historical Review* (AHR). It synthesizes information in governing documents about roles and responsibilities, and it adds a statement of principles of oversight.

History of AHA and AHR

Congress chartered the American Historical Association in 1889 “for the promotion of historical studies, the collection and preservation of historical manuscripts, and for kindred purposes in the interest of American history, and of history in America.” In 1895, two AHA members founded the *American Historical Review* as an independent publication. The journal struggled financially, so AHA began subsidizing it in 1898. The journal became an AHA publication in 1915. The location of the editorial office has changed periodically. (From AHA website.)

Governing Documents

Three AHA governing documents discuss AHR.

1. Constitution (<https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/governance/constitution-and-bylaws>)
2. Bylaws (<https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/governance/constitution-and-bylaws>)
3. Organization, Jurisdiction, and Operation of Association Divisions and Committees, referred to below as Jurisdiction Document (<https://www.historians.org/Documents/OrganizationJurisdiction.pdf>)

The governing documents spell out the following roles and responsibilities.

AHA Council

- Appoints the editor of AHR by majority vote (Bylaws IV:4:1)
- Sets the term of the AHR editor, not to exceed five years (Bylaws IV:4:1)
- May remove the AHR editor by majority vote regardless of the duration of the editor’s appointment (Bylaws IV:4:1)
- Arranges for an annual review of the AHR editor (Bylaws IV:4:2)
- Not less than eighteen months before the end of the editor’s term, determines whether the editor wishes to be reappointed and the terms of any such reappointment (Bylaws IV:4:3)
- If the editor wishes to be reappointed, appoints a review committee of the vice-president for research (chair), a current or past member of the *American Historical Review* Board of Editors who has served during the tenure of the current editor, and a faculty member nominated by the journal’s host department or university (Bylaws IV:4:3:a:ii)

- If the editor does not wish to be reappointed, or if Council decides not to reappoint the editor, Council shall appoint a search committee consisting of the vice-president for research, a current or past member of the Board of Editors or a past member of the AHA Research Division, and two faculty members nominated by the journal's host department or university. The committee will be co-chaired by the vice president for research and a member of the journal's host department or university. Because the editor will typically be appointed to the faculty of the host department, the representatives of the AHA and the department will work toward a consensus candidate prior to submission to the Division (Bylaws IV:4:3:c:ii). [The Bylaws do not name the Division. Because the Research Division oversees the journal, "the Division" presumably means Research Division.]
- Appoints, on nomination by the editor and in consultation with the Research Division, an advisory Board of Editors of the *American Historical Review* to assist the editor. The advisory Board shall consist of thirteen members appointed for staggered terms of three years. The executive director shall, *ex officio*, be a member of the advisory Board without vote (Bylaws IV:4)

Editor of the *AHR*

- Is an appointed officer of the AHA (Constitution IV:1)
- Is a nonvoting member of the AHA Council (Constitution V:1:c)
- Nominates candidates for the *AHR* Board of Editors in consultation with the RD (Bylaws IV:4)

AHR Board of Editors

- Is a permanent committee of the AHA (Organization Jurisdiction Document, Part II).
- Is appointed by AHA Council, on nomination by the editor and in consultation with the Research Division (Bylaws 4:4)
- Advises and assists the *AHR* editor in his or her editorial duties (Jurisdiction Document, Permanent Committees, B)
- Comprises fifteen members. Thirteen are appointed for staggered terms of three years. The fourteenth is the editor of the journal, who chairs the board. The fifteenth is the AHA executive director (Bylaws 4:4).
- Is overseen by Vice President of Research Division on behalf of the Research Division (Jurisdiction Document, Permanent Committees, B and Role of the Vice Presidents).
- As a committee under the RD, may receive charges of specific duties from the VP of the Research division (Organization Jurisdiction Document, Guidelines for Operation, 5:a)
- As a committee under the RD, gives regular reports via its chair on its activities to the VP of the Research Division (Jurisdiction Document, Guidelines for Operation, 5:a)

AHA Research Division

- Oversees the *American Historical Review* (Organization Jurisdiction document, Research Division).
- Receives the name of the search committee's consensus candidate for *AHR* editor (Bylaws IV:4:3:c:ii).
- Oversees the five-year evaluation of the editor (Organization Jurisdiction document, Research Division).
- After receiving the recommendation of the review committee for reappointment of *AHR* editor, makes its recommendation to Council (Bylaws IV:4:3:b:ii)
- Consults with *AHR* editor and offers advice to Council on appointments to the *AHR* Board of Editors (Bylaws IV:4; Jurisdiction Document)
- Oversees the permanent committees under its jurisdiction. *AHR* Board of Editors is a permanent committee assigned to the RD (Organization Jurisdiction Document, Permanent Committees). RD must review and act upon proposals for Council actions emanating from committees under its jurisdiction (thus the Board of Editors, should it make proposals) before they go to Council (Organization Jurisdiction Document, Guidelines for Operation, 5:a).
- Provides the Council with information, advice, and proposals on subjects or areas under its purview (Organization Jurisdiction Document, Part I). *AHR* is under the RD's purview.
- Oversees "The establishment of priorities for the Association's encouragement and support of research and the development and use of new and promising tools of research" (Organization Jurisdiction document). This clause does not mention *AHR*, but the journal plays a role in the encouragement and support of research, as well as in the use of new and promising tools of research.

Vice President, Research Division

- Co-chairs search committee for *AHR* editor (Bylaws IV:4:3:c:ii)
- Chairs the review committee for an *AHR* editor seeking reappointment (Bylaws IV:4:3:a:ii)
- Oversees permanent committees assigned to her or his division. The *AHR* Board of Editors is a permanent committee assigned to RD (Organization Jurisdiction Document, Role of the Vice Presidents). The Vice President, on behalf of the Division, charges the chairs of such committees with specific duties and receives regular reports on committee activities. Proposals for Council action emanating from these committees must first be reviewed and acted upon by the appropriate Division (Organization Jurisdiction document, Guidelines for Operation, 5:a).
- With the assistance of AHA staff, keeps the chair of committees under his or her jurisdiction informed as to pertinent actions of the RD and solicits the committees' opinion in the formulation of policies on such matters (Organization Jurisdiction Document, Guidelines for Operation, 5:b).

AHA Executive Director

- Is a member of the *AHR* Board of Editors (Bylaws IV:4:4)
- Is an *ex officio* member of the Research Division (Organization Jurisdiction Document, The Role of the Executive Director)

- Assists the vice-president for research to formulate policies and projects for submission to the Council on behalf of the Research Division, which oversees *AHR* (Constitution IV:4)

Review Committee for Reappointment of *AHR* editor

- Comprises the vice-president for research (chair), a current or past member of the *American Historical Review* Board of Editors who has served during the tenure of the current editor, and a faculty member nominated by the journal's host department or university (Bylaws IV:4:3:b:ii).
- Reviews the performance of the editor in light of the editor's job description, any specific written directions given to the editor, and the editor's relationship with the Council (Bylaws IV:4:3:b)
- Makes a recommendation to the Research Division, which in turn shall make its recommendation to Council (Bylaws IV:4:3:b:ii)

Search Committee for *AHR* Editor

- Comprises the AHA vice-president for research, a current or past member of the Board of Editors or a past member of the AHA Research Division, and two faculty members nominated by the journal's host department or university (Bylaws IV:4:3:c:ii)
- Is co-chaired by AHA vice president for research and a member of the journal's host department or university (Bylaws IV:4:3:c:ii)

Principles of Oversight

Purpose of principles of oversight

Governing documents assign oversight of *AHR* to the Research Division (RD). The documents spell out some aspects of oversight, such as consultation on appointments to the Board of Editors, while leaving much to the discretion of office holders. Our experience is that organizations function best when individuals have a shared understanding of roles and expectations. Because members of the RD and journal editors change regularly, it would be easy for misunderstandings to arise. This "Principles of Oversight" section creates an institutional memory. It is a tool for clarifying current understanding, not a straitjacket on the RD or journal editors in the future. We expect practices, and perhaps principles, will change with time.

Purpose of the *American Historical Review*

AHA publishes *AHR* to advance the mission of the association (which is "the promotion of historical studies, the collection and preservation of historical manuscripts, and for kindred purposes in the interest of American history, and of history in America"). Currently, the journal focuses on advancing research. Articles and book reviews are the main types of journal content. Other types of content (e.g., roundtables, forums, etc.) appear, too. The journal should retain its focus on research, but it could aim to advance other aspects of the AHA mission as well. RD and Council should approve modifications of the journal's mission.

Spirit of oversight

The spirit of oversight is the same as in other aspects of AHA governance. Everyone involved with the AHA—elected officers, appointed officers, staff, and members—are partners in the effort to advance our discipline. Collegiality, supportiveness, reflection, respect for diversity of views, transparency, confidentiality (when necessary), and compromise (when appropriate) are important. Oversight is not micromanagement. Oversight focuses on goals, performance, and appointments rather than day-to-day management and editorial decisions. RD and Council encourage editors to be creative in adapting the journal to an ever-changing discipline.

AHR Editor

The editor manages the journal, makes editorial decisions, and ensures *AHR* reaches AHA's goals for the journal. The editor has flexibility in selecting the means to reach goals. The editor has autonomy in deciding which pieces the journal publishes, which is important for attracting top editors, preventing political interference, and encouraging creativity. The editor is an *ex officio* member of the AHA Council (under the AHA Constitution) and RD (by tradition) without vote. The editor reports to the Research Division, usually via the vice president for research.

Editor's term plan. Before beginning each term (typically five years), the editor submits a plan for the term to the RD. Normally, the draft term plan will be submitted prior to the RD's fall conference call, and in conjunction with the editor's draft annual plan (below). The term plan spells out the editor's goals, resources needed, and budget. The plan may include other kinds of information. Plan lengths vary, but 3-5 pages is common. The editor discusses the plan with the RD with the aim of agreeing on the plan. If discussion fails to produce agreement, the RD has the authority to require changes. The RD expects not to need to use this authority because the search and reappointment processes should ensure that the RD and editor have common goals. The plan is not a contract. It is statement of the editor's vision. Experience, new ideas, change in the discipline, change in resources, and other variables may lead to modification of goals during an editor's term. The editor and RD revisit the term plan as needed, but usually the editor does not need to revise it. The editor's annual plans usually suffice for updating term plans.

Editor's annual plan. Before the RD's fall conference call, the editor submits a draft plan for the upcoming calendar year to the RD. The annual plan describes the editor's goals, resources, and budget. The plan explains how annual goals help meet, or modify, term goals. The plan may include other kinds of information. Plan lengths vary, but 2-4 pages is common. The editor and RD discuss the plan in the fall RD conference call with the aim of agreement. If discussion fails to produce agreement, the RD has the authority to require changes. The RD expects not to need to use this authority because collegiality, and perhaps compromise, should suffice.

Editor's annual packet. Before the January Council meeting, the editor submits a packet to the Council. To enhance institutional memory and educate new members of

Council, the packet includes copies of documents previously submitted. The packet has four parts.

- (1) Editor's annual report. The report describes the journal's accomplishments, challenges, and finances (budget and expenditures) for the previous year (e.g., the report submitted in December 2016 reports on 2016). It describes the extent to which the journal fulfilled the annual plan submitted one year earlier. If goals changed during the year, the report explains the reasons and results. The report summarizes activities of the Board of Editors. The report may include other kinds of information.
- (2) Editor's annual plan for the upcoming year. The plan incorporates changes, if any, resulting from the fall RD conference call.
- (3) Editor's annual plan for the year about to conclude. Submitted one year earlier, it is included in the packet for the convenience of readers and requires no revision from the original submission.
- (4) Editor's term plan. Submitted at the beginning of the editor's term, it is included in the packet for the convenience of readers and requires no revision from the original submission.

Composition of Board of Editors. The editor consults with the RD on (a) principles used to compose the Board of Editors, and (b) individual nominees for the board. Before the RD spring conference call, the editor submits names and fields of potential nominees for the Board of Editors. This information becomes part of the agenda book for the call. The RD discusses nominees with the editor in the conference call, which should result in a list of mutually-agreeable nominees. After the conference call, the editor submits the names of nominees and their CVs (or links to websites of nominees) to Council for inclusion in the agenda book for the June Council meeting.

Editor's term packet. During the penultimate year of an editor's term (typically year four), the editor submits a term packet to RD and Council in advance of the January Council meeting. The purpose is to collect information useful for Council, RD, the reappointment committee (if the editor wishes reappointment), future editors, and those studying AHA's history. The term packet has four parts.

- (1) A summary report on performance for the whole term. It includes the same categories of information as annual reports, plus recommendations for the journal in the future.
- (2) The editor's term plan. Submitted at the beginning of the editor's term, it is included in the packet for the convenience of readers and requires no revision from the original submission.
- (3) All the editor's annual plans. Submitted earlier, they are included in the packet for the convenience of readers and require no revision from the original submissions.
- (4) All the editor's annual reports. Submitted earlier, they are included in the packet for the convenience of readers and require no revision from the original submissions.

Editor's reappointment packet. During the penultimate year of an editor's term (usually year four), an editor seeking reappointment submits a packet to the reappointment review committee. Submission of the reappointment packet will coincide with submission of the term packet. Council appoints the review committee at the January meeting. The packet has three parts.

- (1) The editor's term packet.
- (2) A plan for the upcoming term.
- (3) All the editor's annual review reports. Previously submitted by annual review committees (see "annual review of editor" below), they are included in the packet for the convenience of readers and require no revision from the original submissions.

Research Division

The Research Division works with the editor to clarify, and help *AHR* reach, AHA's goals for the journal. RD welcomes suggestions from the editor on goals. RD gives editors flexibility in selecting means for reaching goals. RD encourages editors to be creative and explore new kinds of content, especially in ways that enhance the journal's impact on a changing discipline. The four members of RD attend the Board of Editors meeting at the AHA annual meeting. The RD analyzes the budget to ensure wise use of funds.

Annual review of editor. The RD carries out the annual review of the editor via a two-person committee. One member, and chair of the committee, is the vice president for research. The other member is the elected member of the RD who has served on Council the longest (so each elected member of the RD serves once in this role). The committee evaluates the editor's performance as editor and Council member (not as a faculty member at the journal's host institution). After considering the editor's annual packet, the committee evaluates the extent to which the editor and journal reached their goals, any specific written directions given to the editor, and the editor's relationship with the Council. The committee submits a written report on the annual review to the editor, RD, and Council by February 28.

AHA Council

At its January meeting, Council discusses the *AHR* editor's annual packet (with a focus on the annual report and plan for the upcoming year). Before the June meeting, Council members review recent issues of the journal. In executive session at the June meeting, Council discusses the annual review of the editor. In the open part of the June meeting, Council (a) appoints Board of Editors members, and (b) discusses the intellectual content of the journal. The goal of the discussion is to make Council an intellectual resource for the editor and RD.

AHA notifies appointees to the Board of Editors the same way it notifies members of other AHA committees. AHA's appointment letter explains that the board is an AHA committee with responsibility for advising and assisting the editor, and it spells out expectations.

Council delegates responsibility for the annual review of the *AHR* editor to the RD.

Reappointment review

If an editor asks for reappointment, Council appoints a review committee during its January meeting. After reviewing the editor's reappointment packet, the committee assesses the performance of the editor in light of the position's job description, any specific written directions given to the editor, and the editor's relationship with the Council. The review committee submits a written report to the RD by the time of its spring conference call that (a) evaluates the editor's performance, and (b) recommends whether to reappoint the editor or not. The editor receives a copy of the report when it goes to RD. If the editor disagrees with the report, she may submit a written response to the RD within seven days of receiving the report. After waiting seven or more days, the RD votes on whether to recommend reappointment of the editor or not. The VP-RD relays the RD's recommendation, the review committee's report, and the editor's response (if submitted) to Council. At its June meeting, Council votes on whether to reappoint the editor or not.

AHR Board of Editors

The purpose of the Board of Editors is to advise and assist the editor. Currently, board members review manuscripts, suggest reviewers, and organize essays on themes (e.g., in forums, roundtables, and conversations). Roles may change in the future. The editor explains expectations to prospective board members before nominating them.

The board embodies the diversity of the AHA membership. It includes individuals who (among other things) study diverse periods and places, work in diverse thematic fields, and are diverse in gender and ethnicity.

The AHA executive director is an *ex officio* member of the Board of Editors primarily to facilitate communication between the journal and the rest of the AHA. The executive director may offer advice. The editor has the authority to ask the executive director to perform the same tasks as other board members (such as reviewing manuscripts). The editor expects not to use it, except in unusual circumstances, because the executive director plays a different role than other members of the board.

The Board of Editors meets at the AHA annual meeting. The editor chairs the meeting. The four members of the RD and the three AHA presidents are invited. The editor and vice president for research may invite others. All attendees are free to participate in discussions.

As an AHA committee, the Board of Editors is required to submit an annual report to the vice president for research. The editor's annual report fulfills this requirement. The vice president for research has the authority to charge the Board of Editors with tasks. The vice president routinely delegates this authority to the editor and expects not to assign tasks except in unusual circumstances.

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