

To: MRFA Members
From: Lee Easton, MRFA President
Date: March 24, 2021
Subject: Proposed By-law Changes Briefing Note

This briefing note offers an overview of the proposed Bylaws changes, which are intended to address several important aspects of the Association. A key driver behind the proposed changes is to make the Association more open, inclusive and welcoming to all members. A second driver is to follow-up on a commitment made in June 2020, to review the Association's By-laws, policies and procedures to ensure that they create an inclusive Association. Drawing on the work of the Equity Review Working Group, which the Executive Board established in Fall 2020, these recommendations are intended to ensure the Association is a welcoming and inclusive organization. The final driver of these proposed amendments stems from a need to ensure that our organizational structure supports the goals that have been set for the Association. Further details are provided as follows:

A More Open Organization

To be more open and transparent, the Executive Board is using the recently approved policy development process to provide members with an opportunity to comment on-line on proposed By-law changes. The Executive Board will review comments received by March 17, 2021 and assess the need for any changes before the final proposed changes are distributed on March 24, 2021. These are the versions that will be presented at the Special Meeting on April 9, 2021.

The goal of the new process is twofold: to ensure that members are aware of proposed amendments, and second, that members have the opportunity to offer comments on proposals. For clarity, this new process does not preclude or pre-empt more discussion at a Special Meeting. Amendments can still be proposed at the Special Meeting. The process for By-law changes remains unchanged in this regard.

One major change to which I draw your attention is the proposal to create an audit and finance committee, which will take up tasks that have been previously delegated to the Faculty Center Management Committee. These tasks include drafting, recommending and monitoring the Association's budget, dealing with Staff policies, and receiving audited financial statements. Under the proposal, the Audit and Finance Committee will take on these tasks along with the regular cyclical review of the Executive Board roles and reassigned time to support those roles. The proposed Audit and Finance Committee will have some independence from the Executive Board since the proposed committee composition includes 3 appointed members at large, with specific expertise in governance and finances. Should this proposal be accepted, the Faculty Center Management Committee mandate would be revised to focus on managing the Faculty Center and its operations.

Here are some other changes that are intended to make our Association more open to all members.

- Changes to qualifications for President; VP Negotiations; and VP Policy and Senior Grievance Officer from a tenured member to a regular member with five years of MRFA membership and relevant experience
- Changes to the Grievance Committee to add an assistant grievance officer, who must be a contract faculty member
- Changes to create an Audit and Finance Committee and concomitant changes to the Faculty Center Management Committee and the duties of the Treasurer

A More Inclusive and Welcoming Association

Some proposed amendments are intended to make sure our Association is an inclusive and welcoming organization. The proposals include changes that

- Acknowledge our location on the shared lands of the peoples of Treaty 7 including the Niitsitapi, the Tsuu T'ina Nation, the Irahye Nakoda, (the Bearspaw, Chiniki and Wesley First Nations) and the Metis Nation of Alberta, Region 3

- Make provisions for on-line asynchronous candidate forums for those running for election
- Changes to meeting times that take account of dependent care responsibilities.
- Ensure that hybrid voting options exist for members, whenever possible
- Changes to ensure that universal design principles are taken into account for MRFA meetings, where possible

Let me thank the Equity Review Working Group members including Drs. Ghada Alatrash, Melanie Peacock, Irene Shankar and Kim Williams, for their hard work and expertise.

Structural Changes to Reflect the Association's Priorities

The Association continues to prioritize ways to engage members in meaningful ways. While the association offers many opportunities for engagement—we have 110 active members in various MRFA roles and committees this semester—we need to be even more intentional in how we approach member engagement. One proposed change is to clarify the role of the member-at-large on the Board, whose role it has been to meet new members, sit on the Faculty Center management Committee, and this year chair the Professional Standards and Ethics Committee. The proposed By-law change to transform the member-at-large to “member engagement officer” confirms this position’s important role to provide a deliberate and focused approach to member engagement at the Executive Board level. Similarly, the Nominations Committee’s role is also being expanded from a recruitment function to a broader mandate to consider member engagement. In a new way to think about committee composition, the proposed Member Engagement Committee intentionally attempts to ensure representation from the diverse groups that comprise the MRFA. The goal here is to ensure the voices of all our members can be engaged in the Association.

Conclusion

I am mindful that the Association must make changes to ensure that our organization continues to effectively engage and support members while representing the collective interests of the membership. These changes set us on the road to becoming the open, inclusive, welcoming Association we aspire to be. However, as we continue to address the need for systemic changes at Mount Royal University, I know that we too will need to engage those changes within our Association. Indeed, when we return to campus, we may find it timely to revisit our vision and mission statements, which we have not examined since we transitioned to Mount Royal University. Such an undertaking will provide a chance to even more fully evolve the Association.