

Guidelines for Unit Chairs and Special Session Coordinators
American Academy of Religion/Western Region
(proposed at 2009 Annual Meeting)

Unit Chairs and Special Sessions Coordinators serve an important function in providing a guarantee of quality and level of participation in the annual meeting. While the Units of the Region are expected to remain fairly stable over time, Special Sessions are expected to vary from year to year depending upon developments in the field. Unit Chairs should plan to attend each regional conference of the AAR/WR and the Unit Chair meeting scheduled during the conference. Unit Chairs and Special Sessions Coordinators must agree to have their name, email, and contact information published in the Call for Papers.

Unit Chairs shall be elected to a three-year term, upon nomination by the by the Vice-President/Program Chair (VP/PC) and election by the Executive Committee. Unit Chairs shall have a terminal degree, be a doctoral candidate, or be otherwise recognized in the field; they shall have a scholarly or other appropriate track-record as evidenced by a C.V. provided to the VP/PC; finally, they shall have had demonstrated participation in the AAR/WR. Duties and responsibilities shall include: reviewing paper and panel proposals for the unit they convene; checking that those proposing papers are members of the AAR; organizing separate paper proposals into thematically coherent panels; arranging for panel moderators and assisting with finding respondents, if appropriate; informing those who have submitted proposals whether or not their proposal has been accepted; submitting proposed panels to WECSOR Executive Secretary and to the VP/PC for inclusion in the annual regional meeting program; attending unit panels during the annual meeting; attending the Unit Chairs meeting at the annual meeting; providing additional information to the Board of Directors of AAR/WR as requested.

[From proposed Constitution and By-Law changes, 2009.]

The following should help Unit Chairs organize sessions for the annual meeting.

1. Call for Papers. Notify the VP/PC of the topics to be included in the Call for Papers. Provide a two- or three-sentence description of your unit. (See the national AAR website for ideas on two-line unit descriptions.) Be sure to provide the contact information for sending proposals to your unit in case we do not use OP3. **The deadline for sending Calls for Papers to the VP/PC is May 15.**

2. Receiving Papers. If we use OP3, your jobs will be simplified. If not, you may receive papers via email or snail mail, as you prefer. Make sure that all potential panelists have completed the Program Participant Form [see under Policies and Procedures] so that you can verify membership in the AAR, and can ascertain AV needs for each presenter. **The deadline for receiving paper proposals September 30.**

3. Organizing sessions. Organize coherent sessions of three to four papers each (as best you can). Each unit is allotted *two sessions*; however, there may be time and space during the meeting for some units to hold more than two sessions. If you have enough strong proposals to organize more than two sessions – or if you are organizing *fewer* than two sessions – let the VP/PC know as soon as possible. The Program Chair will let you know whether you may organize additional sessions. **The deadline for proposing panels to the VP/PC is October 15.**

4. Session Chairs and Respondents. You are encouraged but not required to solicit a respondent or chair for each session. Consider inviting senior or established scholars from the area where the conference will be held. When inviting respondents, it is helpful to include the panelists' names, institutional affiliations, and paper titles. You should also let possible respondents know that AAR/WR will waive their registration fee in return for their service. Be sure to let the Executive Secretary of WECSOR know of their participation so that name badges can be prepared for respondents.

5. Special Topics or Special Sessions. If you have proposals that are oriented to the conference theme that you cannot fit into a session, forward them to the VP/PC, who arranges Special Topics sessions. The VP/PC may be able to place them.

6. If you need more proposals. Attempt to organize a panel of experts on an important topic in your unit's area. Alternatively, contact the VP/PC as soon as you can if you cannot creatively address the problem.

7. If you have extra proposals. Please notify the VP/PC as soon as possible so that extra sessions might be established.

8. Acceptance Notifications. Please do **not** notify participants of acceptance until the VP/PC has verified that there are no schedule conflicts or duplicate participants. This should occur by October 30. **Each presenter may present only a single paper or response at each regional conference.** If a presenter has two proposals accepted, one must be dismissed. Once the VP/PC okays proposed sessions, you may notify participants of acceptance and receive their confirmations that they will be presenting their papers at the conference. Send them the "Guidelines for Presenting Papers at the AAR/WR." Stress the importance of 1) following through on their commitment to present papers; and 2) joining the national AAR before they present at the regional conference.

9. Rejected proposals. Do not inform writers of rejected proposals of their rejections until your proposed program plans have been accepted by the VP/PC (unless the proposals lack quality and would not be used elsewhere.) Once you have ascertained that these papers will not be included in the conference, inform the authors that you

have not accepted their papers. Be as positive as you can; e. g., encourage them to attend the meeting anyway, to submit proposals again next year, and so on. **Please notify all participants of acceptance or rejection by October 30.**

10. Provide statistics. Send the VP/PC figures on how many proposals you received, how many you accepted, and how many you rejected. It will be helpful for future meeting planning if you briefly indicate reasons for rejection, e.g., too many proposals, the proposal was sub-par, proposal did not fit into a coherent session, etc.

11. Cancellations. Let the VP/PC know about any cancellations you receive as soon as you hear about them. This has implications for registration as well as for the final program.