Project Oversight Group Selection Guidelines

Overview

This document outlines considerations and options for selecting Project Oversight Group (POG) members for SOA Practice Research projects. It is intended to be used as a resource by project sponsors, POG chairs, POG members and staff to establish a POG and make adjustments during the course of a project as needed. A POG should be considered a partnership of the project sponsors, POG chairs, POG members and staff to recruit members who work effectively with the goal of delivering research material of the highest quality and standards expected of the SOA. The guidelines cover three areas: (1) Suggestions for Composition of the POG and POG Size, (2) Role of the POG Chair, and (3) Methods of Recruitment.

It should be noted upfront that these guidelines are also intended to cover SOA research projects with material that may inform Public Policy. However, it is suggested that SOA staff be consulted in such cases should any further considerations be appropriate.

Composition of a Project Oversight Group (POG)

A POG should optimally be composed of individuals with varying backgrounds including non-actuaries, who work in tandem to ensure the project objectives are met and results in a quality outcome. It can be definitely said that with an effective POG the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Considerations for a balanced POG include members who:

1. Bring appropriate skillsets and expertise
2. Have relevant work experience
3. Provide balance among those who have volunteered fairly regularly on previous SOA research projects and those volunteering for the first time. Being a POG member is a learning opportunity that also provides professional development across many levels of experience – in this regard, having a mix of experienced and new members helps ensure the final material will appeal to a variety of audiences. It is one of our goals to encourage those who may not have volunteered before and/or who bring the perspective of readers/audience to get a sense of the SOA research process while receiving useful education. Through this, we are hoping they will consider volunteering for future projects as they also gain valuable professional development.
4. Represent and liaise to applicable research committees and sponsors including those from the SOA and outside organizations. POG members who have liaison responsibilities to co-sponsoring entities should be so designated. POG members who have relationships with other professions and organizations may help with publicizing the work and disseminating it to actuarial and non-actuarial audiences besides the SOA.
5. Provide diversity in terms of: expertise in aspects of the applicable topic (for example, some members are more focused on life products and others on annuity products); employment by academic institutions vs. employment by for-profit companies vs non-profit associations; employment as advisors to individuals and employment in government service; experience in different regions (both in and outside of North America); expertise in other disciplines such as law and economics.
6. Demonstrate enthusiasm for the topic and can devote sufficient time to the POG to provide useful feedback

As a general comment, it may be helpful to request during the recruitment process, a bio and brief description of why the volunteer is interested in a particular opportunity. This can be particularly beneficial when considering and recruiting POG members who are not members of the SOA and who may have a particular expertise in a topic.

POG Size

As a rule of thumb, POGs function best with a group size range of five to nine members based on historical experience. This range has traditionally provided an ideal balance of member engagement and manageability. Exceptions to this range include projects that require little management and/or only require specific, focused feedback. In these cases, a POG size below the range may be appropriate. An example would be a research paper focused on a technical topic which involves specialized expertise and limited experts to draw upon. Exceptions where a POG size greater than nine members can be beneficial include projects requiring significant multi-disciplinary expertise and/or result in a high number of volunteers interested in participating (there have been projects where more than 50 volunteers have expressed interest in being a POG member). One way of managing such projects is to appoint a smaller, core group of POG members that participate regularly in all conference calls, etc. while using a larger overall group in a more advisory capacity.

POG Chair

One ingredient of a successful POG is having a conscientious chair of the group. The POG chair helps to lead the conference calls, works with staff to resolve issues, and acts as the primary volunteer contact for the effort. Being a POG chair is a great way to both gain leadership experience and champion an effort that is of particular professional interest. There are several ways to become POG chair and may occur at different points during the course of a project:

1. Having the original idea for a project
2. Taking the lead in writing a Request for Proposals or Call for Papers
3. Being requested by the project sponsors to take on the role
4. Expressing interest in the role at the initial conference call for the project
5. Volunteering for the role as the project progresses and the actual research is conducted

For any of the above, staff is available to consult with those interested in the role for questions on the responsibilities of the role and for general advice. If a POG chair cannot be recruited for some reason, staff will act in this role for the duration of the project.

Methods of Recruitment

In keeping with the goal of a well-balanced POG, the following is a list of options for recruiting members. Given the number of options, it is suggested that volunteers involved in recruiting discuss with staff the most appropriate options for a given POG before recruitment begins.

1. Blast e-mails to individual sections, committees or the entire SOA membership
2. Individual e-mails or calls to a list of qualified candidates
3. Reviewing and contacting the members of previous POGs with related topics
4. Research Committee and Section identified volunteers (for example, council members or active section members with known expertise)
5. General volunteer database that is composed of volunteers who have applied through the SOA website. Further information on this database can be found on this webpage: http://www.soa.org/volunteer-program/volunteer-default/
6. Research member communications – SOA News Today, Section Newsletters, etc.
7. Networking with SOA member at events and meetings for suggestions
8. Presenters at meetings of the applicable topic
9. SOA Engage
10. Encouraging recent fellows during Fellowship Admission Courses
11. Social Media – The SOA is continually increasing its presence on social media including LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and additional options as they become available.
12. Research Executive Committee members and their suggestions
13. Suggestions from the researcher, but being careful not to cause conflict of interest issues. Normally, this occurs when a project involves a methodology that is not widely known among actuaries.
14. Staff recommendations