

Program Unit Chair
Handbook

Society of Biblical
Literature

This document, developed by the Executive Office and the International Meeting Program Committee in consultation with program unit chairs, lays out policies, procedures, and best practices for management of the SBL International Meeting program. It should serve as a routinely referenced guide for program unit chairs and should facilitate diversity, collegiality, and mutual respect at the meeting.

International
Meeting

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Dear Program Unit Chair:

Thanks for your willingness to serve the SBL by chairing a program unit. The quality of sessions at our meetings is the result of your leadership; you serve in a vital and demanding position. You cultivate opportunities for the community of scholars that is SBL, advancing the academic study of biblical literature from a wide spectrum of methodological approaches and a variety of professional contexts.

On behalf of this community of scholars, we thank you for your efforts and look forward to your continued service. We also provide several benefits to you as the chair of a program unit.

- Reservations: as a Society VIP, you are guaranteed a sleeping room reservation at a headquarters hotel, which will ensure that you are close to the action at the meeting.
- Program Unit Chairs' Breakfast: on the Tuesday of the Annual Meeting, you are invited to a breakfast with other Program Unit Chairs, the Annual and International Meeting Program Committees, and staff. This meal will feature an annual program update and time to discuss program-related issues.
- Letter to your dean or department chair expressing appreciation for the service you provide biblical, religious and/or theological education. These letters help accentuate one piece of support for promotion and tenure at many institutions. Obviously if you are an independent scholar or hold a job outside education we will express appreciation to a designated person.

Sincerely,

Kristin De Troyer
Chair, International Meeting Program
Committee
Society of Biblical Literature

Charles G. Haws
Manager of Programs
Society of Biblical Literature

Principles

With roughly 10% of membership in attendance each year, the International Meeting (IM) provides a unique vehicle by which to foster biblical scholarship and nurture its influence in the general culture, the academy, religious communities, and general education.

Program units comprise the IM. These units are working groups of SBL members that are approved by the International Meeting Program Committee (IMPC) to organize sessions at the IM. Program units issue calls for papers annually and are responsible for reviewing presentation proposals, organizing sessions, and providing program information to the Executive Office (EO) for scheduling and publication. Therefore, program units are integral to the IM, and the IMPC must maintain an intimate knowledge of and connection with program units.

The role of a program unit chair involves strategic thinking and intentional balancing of its topics of inquiry, as well as careful planning about how the program unit will develop. This role can be described by three continuums.

Broad/Core and Specialized/Peripheral

Find a way to balance traditional or well-established methodologies and topics with cutting edge or innovative ones. Some topics present themselves as central or foundational, while others appear peripheral. Core topics should be balanced with emerging trends.

Senior Voices and Junior Voices

Find a way to balance senior voices with junior voices, providing opportunity for dialogue and professional development.

Receive and Pursue

Find a way to balance receiving proposals from open calls for papers and pursuing participants important to the unit's purview.

Responsibilities of Chairs

Communicate with Executive Office

- Program Unit Chairs (PUCs) are the primary communication link between the EO and the program unit.
- All listed chairs will receive automatic emails generated by the PU Management System for the program unit and all program-related notices the EO generates as reminders.

Manage Unit through the PU Management System

- Enter call for papers (CFP) into online system.
 - The program unit chair needs to enter the CFP each year, even if it remains the same year to year.
 - It is expected that the steering committee will work with the chair to develop the CFP.
 - The chair must also designate the CFP as “open” or “closed” to outside proposals each year.
- Enter decisions on papers into system and communicate with proposers.
 - All papers will initially show the status of “Submitted.”
 - Papers can be designated as Pending, Accepted, Rejected, or Withdrawn.
 - Changing a paper to Accepted or Rejected immediately generates an email to the paper proposer informing him/her of the decision.
 - All papers must have a decision entered by the deadline below.
- Create and organize sessions in system, including adding presiders.
 - The chair must assign and arrange the papers in each session and should assign times for each participant.
 - A presider is required for each session.

Program unit chairs are encouraged but not required to:

- Attend sessions of their program unit.
- Preside at sessions of their unit. (The best practice is to invite others to preside.)
- Attend meetings in which their units are holding sessions.

Dates and Deadlines

Call for Papers

- CFPs must be entered by **October 15** for the following year's meeting.

Review of Proposals

- All proposals must be reviewed and decisions rendered by **February 15**.

Organization of Sessions

- All session information must be entered by **March 1** so that the overall program can be scheduled.

Program Changes

- Final program changes to be published in the *Session Guide* sent to all members are due by **May 1**.

Renewal of Program Unit Chair or Steering Committee Member Term

- Notification of renewal or non-renewal is due by **August 1** of the year the program unit expires.
- In the case of non-renewal, replacement information—new chair name and SBL ID—must be received by **August 1**.

Renewal of Unit

- Completed renewal materials are due by **September 1** of the year the program unit expires.

New Program Unit Proposals

- Completed proposal materials are due by **September 1** of the year prior to the program unit's start

Best Practices

Considering International Meeting structures and policies, a number of best practices have emerged. These practices should guide you as you do your work as program unit chair, and you should feel welcome to contribute to them as experience brings new challenges and solutions to light.

Organizing the Call for Papers

- Consult with your co-chair and steering committee members during the International Meeting to develop and finalize a call for papers for the following meeting.
- If a CFP will not be used because all proposals are to be invited (e.g., in the case of a Seminar), then the chair should develop a brief, informational description of session plans.

Reviewing Proposals

- Review proposals after the deadline for proposal submission.
- Run the “Proposal Report” available in the Program Unit Management System and send to co-chair and steering committee members for review.
- Consider proposals collectively and comparatively and accept quality proposals. Attention should be given to broad inclusiveness in the selection of program participants.
- All proposals must be reviewed and decisions rendered by **February 15**.

Organizing Sessions

- Note the number of sessions your program unit is allotted.
- At least four papers, or at least four persons in addition to a presider in the case of panels, should populate a session.
- Papers are typically allotted 15-25 minutes in a session, with 5-10 minutes for discussion.
- Sessions range in duration from 90 to 150 minutes and may not exceed 150 minutes.
- Each session must have a presider.
- All session information must be entered by **March 1** so that the overall program can be scheduled.
- All participants must have current SBL (or Affiliate) membership and must be registered by **May 1**.

Program Changes

- Review session information in June with co-chair and steering committee members and finalize participant and presider information, especially participant name, institution, and presentation title.
- Final program changes to be published in the *Session Guide* sent to all members are due in the Program Unit Management System by **May 1**.

International Meeting Program Committee

The International Meeting Program Committee plans and evaluates the International Meeting and individual program units.

Relation to Annual Meeting Program Committee

The Annual Meeting and International Meeting are autonomous. Program unit proposals are made for one meeting, and the committees for each meeting review proposals independently. The committees converse about overall program strategy but act independently of each other.

A Calendar of the AM Program Committee's Work

Feb – Apr	Review of new program unit proposals, review of IM program
May – Jul	Discussion and evaluation of IM program, including participation levels, topics, etc. for
Aug – Nov	Discussion and evaluation of long-term goals and policies
Dec – Jan	Recess

Program Unit Review

Proposals for International Meeting program units, whether new or seeking renewal, will be evaluated based on the following criteria.

1. Evidence of advancing biblical scholarship or the relation of that scholarship to contiguous disciplines.
2. Evidence of sufficient SBL member interest to sustain the program unit for the proposed period.
3. Significance of topics of program unit beyond its immediate constituency.
4. Evidence of need for program unit and relationship to existing program units.
5. Mechanisms for evaluation and self-criticism, including critical assessment of the program unit's own method(s), biases, and perspectives.
6. Quality, commitment, and diversity of program unit's proposed leadership.
7. Evidence of involving a diverse steering committee constituency (e.g., gender, racial and ethnic backgrounds, levels of professional status, institutional affiliations) and commitment to variation in methodological approaches.
8. Plans for refereeing proposals, including student member paper proposals.
9. Plans, when appropriate, for communication of steering committee between International Meetings.

The criteria for renewal shall generally be the same as those for establishment, though achievement (rather than promise) is relevant. The SBL International Meeting Program Committee evaluates all unit proposals and renewals collectively and comparatively.

Options for response

The committee has the following options in its decisions regarding program units.

1. **Renewals:** Accept, Reject, or Needs revision
2. **New Proposals:** Accept, Reject, Needs revision, or Special session

The committee may offer proposers the opportunity to organize a special session at the upcoming International Meeting and to report on that session as part of a revised proposal for the following year. This option does not guarantee acceptance of the unit in the following year but provides an opportunity to introduce the unit to the program and gauge its appeal.

Policies

Statement on Participation

By submitting a proposal and/ or accepting a role in any affiliate organization or program unit at the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, you agree to participate in an open discussion from an academic perspective. By participating, you agree to be a member of the intellectual community of SBL, an organization with rules of discourse and engagement consonant with other learned societies in the humanities that honor intellectual freedom and critical engagement.

Chairs and Steering Committee

- **Terms of office**
 - *Program Unit Chair (PUC)*: 3-year term, renewable once
 - *Steering Committee Member (SCM)*: 3-year term, renewable once
 - After fulfilling her term, a PUC may serve as an SCM or vice versa.
- **Size of program unit committee**
 - A program unit may have 1 to 2 PUCs.
 - A program unit may have 2 to 4 SCMs.
 - The total number of persons on a program unit committee, therefore, may not exceed six.
- PUCs and SCMs should hold a doctorate in the field of or a field related to biblical studies that was granted at least three years before the start of the person's term as PUC or SCM; however, as many as one SCM may be ABD or within three years of his/her receipt of a doctorate.
- Only SBL members may chair PUs; ordinarily chairs have several years of professional experience beyond the completion of the doctoral degree. No member may chair more than two PUs.
- Only SBL members may serve as steering committee members. No member may serve on more than two steering committees, whether as chair or member.
- If a program unit chair's term is expiring and the chair has taken suitable steps to find a replacement without success, then the Executive Office may extend the program unit chair's tenure for a single year.

Any grievances against these policies or the conduct of program unit chairs, steering committee members, presenters, or attendees should be immediately referred to the chair of the International Meeting Program Committee in writing.

Program Units

- **New proposals**
 - New program unit proposals must follow the Checklist for New Proposals.
- **Types**
 - *Consultation*: usually the first incarnation of a PU and formed to explore the viability of and interest in a subject; also short-term units responding to current trends or topics/methods/inquires new to the SBL program
 - *Section*: usually more broadly defined; offers presenters most access for unsolicited papers; required to have at least one open session each year

- *Seminar*: long-range collaborative research topics/papers that require active participation and well-defined research topics or projects; limited membership; papers are generally pre-distributed and summarized and discussed, not read, at meetings

***Groups and Workshops have been eliminated. Units of these types will complete their terms as such; if they pursue renewal, they will choose to be either Sections or Seminars.

- **Terms**
 - *Consultation*: 3 year term, non-renewable
 - *Section*: 6 year term, renewable
 - *Seminar*: 6 year term, renewable
- **Session Limits**
 - *Consultation*: 2
 - *Section*: 3; a fourth session may be organized if this session is jointly organized with another SBL program unit or Affiliate organization
 - *Seminar*: 3; a fourth session may be organized if this session is jointly organized with another SBL program unit or Affiliate organization

Program Participation

- **Participation Limits**
 - A person is limited to participate in no more than two regular program sessions as a presenter, panelist, or respondent. Appearances on Affiliate programs do not count towards this total. SBL Committee and business sessions do not count towards this total.
- **Proposals**
 - Proposals **must** be submitted through the online system, including invited proposals.
 - All presentations must be new presentations of the scholar's own original work. *In absentia* presentations are not typically accepted.
 - Papers cannot be repeated in other sessions or at other SBL meetings. Papers presented at an SBL regional meeting, however, can be presented at a subsequent International or International Meeting.

Registration and Membership Requirements

- **SBL Program**
 - SBL Membership is required at the time of a proposal for the SBL program.
 - SBL Membership will be checked by **May 1**, and non-current members will be removed from the program at that time.
 - SBL Membership must be current at time of the International Meeting.
- **Affiliate Organization Programs**
 - Affiliate organization membership is required to participate.
 - If a member of an Affiliate organization intends to participate in an SBL session, the member is required to have current SBL membership.
- **Registration for Meeting**

- All meeting participants must be registered by **May 1**. Registration will be checked, and those not registered will be removed from the program.

Special Sessions

- Special sessions should be discussed with and programmed as a part of ongoing International Meeting Program Units whenever possible. Proposers are responsible for contacting related program units prior to submitting a proposal for an independent session.
- Book reviews should be discussed with and programmed as a part of ongoing International Meeting Program Units. Proposers are responsible for contacting related program units prior to submitting a proposal for an independent session. If a book review session cannot be organized through existing program units, then it is to be considered an Additional Meeting. Please see the [SBL International Meeting website](#) for information on Additional Meetings.

Waivers

Program unit chairs may submit waiver requests for scholars who are not members of SBL. The consideration for waiver is not simply whether one is or is not a "biblical scholar," but whether one works regularly with the literatures, histories, and cultures (material and social) that interface "Bible," broadly construed, for this is the milieu from which persons join SBL as members regularly.

- Membership waivers for participation are granted to those from "outside the discipline." Those who are within related disciplines must become SBL members to participate on the program. (Related disciplines include religion, archaeology, ancient near eastern studies, etc.)
- Membership in other related organizations (e.g., AAR, ASOR) does not qualify one for a waiver.
- Waivers are granted on a one-time basis only. If a waiver recipient wishes to participate on the program a second time in subsequent years, he or she must join the SBL.
- Waivers will not be granted to expired SBL members.
- A waiver for the International Meeting includes:
 - Complimentary membership through the month of the International Meeting;
 - Complimentary meeting registration;
- The waivers program is administered by the Executive Office in consultation with the International Meeting Program Committee.