

SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

This document, developed by the Executive Office and the Annual Meeting Program Committee in consultation with program unit chairs, lays out policies, procedures, and best practices for management of the SBL Annual 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.

Revised 24 August 2023

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Thanks

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 an official meeting 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 Meeting Program Committee, 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.

Principles

With over 40% of membership in attendance each year, the Annual Meeting (AM) provides an unparalleled 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 AM. These units are working groups of SBL members that are approved by the Annual Meeting Program Committee (AMPC) to organize sessions at the AM. 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 AM, and the AMPC 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.

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.
 - Ensure that participants, especially invitees, are aware of requirements for participation. This includes the requirement that all meeting participants register by June 1. If a participant is not registered by then, he or she risks being removed from the program. The program management system does not notify chairs whether participants have or have not registered. Chairs should correspond with participants prior to June 1 to verify that they have registered.

Program unit chairs are encouraged but not required to:

- Attend sessions of their program unit.
- Preside at sessions of their unit.
- Attend meetings in which their units are holding sessions.
- Actively seek collaboration with other program units and the organization of joint sessions

Dates and Deadlines

Call for Papers

- CFPs must be entered by **mid-December** for the following year's meeting.

Review of Proposals

- All proposals must be reviewed and decisions rendered around **April 1**.

Organization of Sessions

- All session information, including audio-visual and scheduling requests, must be entered around **April 1** so that the overall program can be scheduled.
- Ensure that participants, especially invitees, are aware of requirements for participation. This includes the requirement that all meeting participants register by June 1. If a participant is not registered by then, he or she risks being removed from the program. The program management system does not notify chairs whether participants have or have not registered. Chairs should correspond with participants prior to June 1 to verify that they have registered.

Renewal of Unit

- Completed renewal materials are due by **August 1** of the year the program unit expires.
- Changes in Program Unit Chairs and Steering Committee Members (SCMs) should be noted in the application.

Renewal of Program Unit Chair or Steering Committee Member Term

- Renewal of PUC and SCM terms should be communicated to the Executive Office by **December 1** of the year prior to the meeting when they will take effect. In the event of nonrenewal, replacements should be submitted by the same date.

New Program Unit Proposals

- Completed proposal materials are due by **January 15** of the year of the Annual Meeting in which the program unit intends to participate.

Best Practices

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 Annual 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. Once review is complete, if there is a surplus of quality proposals, attention should be given to broad inclusiveness in the selection of program participants.
- All proposals must be reviewed and decisions rendered by **April 1**.

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; however, innovative ideas for how to organize a session (e.g., shorter paper length, round table discussion) are welcome.
- Sessions range in duration from 90 to 150 minutes and may not exceed 150 minutes.
- Each session must have a presider who is a member of SBL. Joint sessions with AAR or an Affiliate may have a presider who is a member of that organization.
- All session information must be entered by **April 1** so that the overall program can be scheduled.
- All participants must have current SBL (or Affiliate) membership and must be registered by **July 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 *Program Book* are due in the Program Unit Management System by **July 1**. Changes requested after this date will be made only at the discretion of the Director of Programs.

Fostering a Collegial Environment

It is the responsibility of program-unit chairs to ensure that their committees maintain professional conduct as outlined in the [SBL Professional Conduct Policy](#). This includes running collegial sessions at SBL meetings. Personal or personalized attacks are unprofessional and should not be tolerated. Program unit chairs are encouraged to let people who have experienced harassment know about SBL's processes for reporting and handling such behavior.

Assembling a Steering Committee

Steering committees should be assembled with an eye toward increasing diversity, paying particularly close attention to gender, ethnic, and religious diversity. Program units should also take care to include members in a variety of career paths and stages, in order to provide opportunities for junior scholars both to be mentored and to have leadership opportunities. Attention to these matters is important in light of the fact that SBL membership is roughly 25% women, with an even smaller percentage coming from underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities.

In addition, other than those program units that focus on perspectival criticism, steering committees should represent a diversity of ideologies and methodologies. Those focused on perspectival readings should also reflect the diversity of practices and practitioners within those fields of study.

Importance of Diversity in Session Planning

SBL membership is roughly one quarter women, with an even smaller percentage coming from underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities. With the goal of not just matching but increasing these numbers, participants in sessions should, to the extent possible, reflect gender, ethnic, ideological, and methodological diversity.

Sessions should be arranged with diversity in mind, in order to increase the active participation of minority groups and to encourage greater diversity in the field. This applies to both open and invited sessions.

Annual Meeting Program Committee

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

Relation to International Meeting Program Committee

The Annual Meeting and International Meeting are autonomous from one another. 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

Jan – Mar	Review of new program unit proposals, review of AM program
Apr – May	Discussion and evaluation of AM program, including participation levels, topics, etc.
Jun – Jul	Recess
Aug – Dec	Discussion and evaluation of long-term goals and policies, review of renewal proposals

Program Unit Review

The committee reviews program unit renewals prior to the final Annual Meeting of the unit's expiration (e.g., September 2018 for a unit ending its term after the 2018 Annual Meeting). The committee receives proposals by September 1 and reviews all proposals and remits feedback to proposers before November 1. New program unit proposals are reviewed in the spring of the year in which they are intended to begin. The committee receives proposals by February 1 and reviews all proposals and remits feedback to proposers by March 1.

Criteria for Program Unit Review

Proposals for Annual 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 Annual Meetings.

The criteria for renewal shall generally be the same as those for establishment, though achievement (rather than promise) is relevant. The SBL Annual 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 Annual 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 Annual 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.

SBL Professional Conduct Statement

View the SBL Professional Conduct statement at https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/Meetings/Professional_Conduct_Policy.pdf.

SBL Policy on Scholarly Presentation and Publication of Ancient Artifacts

View the SBL Professional Conduct statement at https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/SBL-Artifacts-Policy_20160903.pdf.

Chairs and Steering Committee

- **Terms of office**
 - *Program Unit Chair (PUC)*: three-year term, renewable once
 - *Steering Committee Member (SCM)*: three-year term, renewable once
 - After fulfilling her term, a PUC may serve as an SCM or vice versa. That is, these terms are specific to roles, not to the unit itself. Therefore, a given

individual may serve up to two three-year terms as chair and then up to two three-year terms as steering committee member (total of twelve years).

- **Size of program unit committee**
 - A program unit may have one (1) to two (2) PUCs.
 - A program unit may have two (2) to four (4) SCMs.
 - The total number of persons on a program unit committee, therefore, may not exceed six (6).
- 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.
- If a PUC or SCM has served two terms for a given unit, then s/he must take a hiatus before returning to either role for that unit. Such a hiatus is required to encourage new ideas and diversity in unit leadership, but the length of the hiatus is not specified. Units should decide the appropriate length of the hiatus, although it should be no less than one year.
- PUCs and SCMs are required to maintain SBL membership throughout the duration of the term.

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 Annual Meeting Program Committee in writing.

Program Units

Information about program unit types, terms, and the application and renewal process is kept up to date at <https://www.sbl-site.org/meetings/programunits.aspx>.

- **Types**
 - *Consultation*: usually the first incarnation of a program unit; formed to explore the viability of and interest in a subject; can be short-term units responding to current trends or topics/methods/inquires new to the SBL program.
 - *Section*: offers presenters most access for unsolicited papers; required to have at least one open session each year; session types include paper readings, panel discussions, and workshops that involve practical, hands-on, learning opportunities related to teaching and/or research applications.
 - *Seminar*: long-range collaborative research topics/papers that require active participation and well-defined research topics or projects; unit chairs generally

collect papers before meeting and distribute to participant group; papers usually are summarized and discussed, not read, at meetings.

- **Terms**
 - *Consultation*: three-year term, non-renewable
 - *Section*: six-year term, renewable
 - *Seminar*: six-year term, renewable
- **Typical Number of Sessions**
 - *Consultation*: two (2)
 - *Section*: three (3); a fourth session may be organized if this session is jointly organized with another SBL program unit or Affiliate organization
 - *Seminar*: three (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**
 - Full members of SBL are 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.
 - Student members of SBL may participate in two sessions as presider, panelist, or respondent but are limited to one paper presentation.
- **Proposals**
 - Proposals **must** be submitted through the online system, including invited proposals.
 - As of 2023, first-time presenters (full and student members of SBL) are no longer required to submit paper to-be-read to the program unit chair(s) during the call for papers period.
 - 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 Annual 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 **June 1**, and non-current members will be removed from the program at that time.
 - SBL Membership must be current at time of the Annual 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 **June 1**. Registration will be checked, and those not registered will be removed from the program.

Offsite Sessions

- Offsite sessions require a higher degree of planning and coordination with the Executive Office. Plans for any offsite session should be submitted as early as possible, but no later than April 1. Chairs should also notify the Director of Programs of these plans via email. Organizers of offsite sessions are responsible for making arrangements with the proposed host institution prior to the submission of a proposal. SBL will not pay rental, site-use, or transportation fees for offsite sessions except when such fees are collected as a part of a workshop for which attendees pay an additional fee at registration. Organizers must provide the name, e-mail, and phone number of a staff member or contact person at the host institution who is aware of plans for the session.

Special Sessions

- Special sessions should be discussed with and programmed as a part of ongoing Annual Meeting Program Units whenever possible. Proposers are responsible for contacting related program units prior to submitting a proposal for an independent session. Consult the Annual Meeting Program Committee if you are interested in but cannot secure opportunities for collaboration.
- Book reviews should be discussed with and programmed as a part of ongoing Annual 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 Other Event. Please see the [SBL Annual Meeting website](#) for information on Additional Meetings.

Waivers

The general expectation is that participants in sessions sponsored by SBL program units must be members of SBL. Program unit chairs may submit waiver requests for scholars who are not members of SBL. The intention of waivers is to invite people from outside the disciplines closely associated with biblical studies who would not normally be expected to join SBL. Accordingly, the consideration for a waiver is not simply whether one is or is not a "biblical scholar," but whether one works regularly with the literatures, histories, languages, and/or cultures (material and social) that interface "Bible," broadly construed, for this is the milieu from which persons join SBL as members regularly.

- Membership and registration waivers for participation are granted to those from "outside the discipline." **Those whose primary work is in related disciplines must become SBL members to participate on the program.** Related disciplines include, but are not limited to, religion, theology, archaeology, ancient Near Eastern studies (including Assyriology and Egyptology), early Judaism, classics, etc.

- AAR members are not eligible for waivers but may participate in SBL sessions without obtaining SBL membership. Please contact the Director of Programs if you wish to have an AAR member who is not a member of SBL participate in a session.
- Expired members of SBL and prior attendees of the Annual and International Meetings are not eligible for a waiver.
- Waivers are granted on a one-time basis only. If a waiver recipient wishes to participate on the program in a subsequent meeting, he or she must join SBL.
- A waiver for the Annual Meeting may include one or both of the following:
 - complimentary membership through the month of the Annual Meeting
 - complimentary meeting registration
- The waivers program is administered by the Executive Office in consultation with the Annual Meeting Program Committee.

Appendix I: Guidelines for Session Presiders

The following guidelines are intended to help those who are moderating sessions encourage a professional and respectful environment.

Before the Session:

1. Confirm that presenters are able to access previously requested A/V. If there is a problem, look for an A/V tech in the hallway or come to the registration desk.
2. Do not rearrange room. Doing so will result in additional charges for which the program unit will be responsible. If there is a problem with the room setup, contact SBL staff.

Beginning of the Session:

1. Welcome the attendees to the session.
2. Be sure to mention the name of the program unit(s) sponsoring the session and any theme that the session might have.
3. Announce that the first row of seats is prioritized for those with medical and accessibility needs. Attendees without such needs should be prepared to give up those seats upon request.

During the Session:

1. If all seats are taken, leaving some attendees standing, presiders should scan the room between papers to see if anyone with accessibility issues might be provided a seat by someone seated. Since disabilities are not always visible, this should include asking if anyone needs a seat.

Presentations:

1. Address. Refer to all panelists equally. Studies show that it is more common for women to be referred to by their first names even when they have a professional title. Demonstrating respect, you should confirm ahead of the session how panelists would like to be introduced. We recommend having you announce the first name and last name, so as to avoid using titles that some presenters/respondents might not have.
2. Sound. If there are microphones in the room, ask each presenter to use the microphone. Even if a presenter thinks that he or she speaks loudly enough, microphone amplification helps all audience members, especially those who have a hearing impairment.
3. Time. Managing time is critical so that each person in the session or on the panel has an equal opportunity to present. Before the session, reiterate the expectation for each presentation's length. Presiders should sit near the podium, in order to communicate with the speakers presenting. We recommend having a five-minute warning, a one-minute warning, and a "time is up" sign for you to use.

Discussion:

1. Try to allow for at least 15 minutes for a question-and-answer period.

2. During Q & A, remind the audience to avoid jargon, speak briefly (no more than 30 seconds), and ask a question. Repeat the question after it is asked. This also makes sure that the person asking the question knows that they have been heard.
3. To ensure parity, please be mindful of who is asking questions. Research shows that when women or gender non-conforming people are called on first, there tends to be more gender balance among subsequent questioners.

Please also be sure to familiarize yourself with SBL's [Professional Conduct Policy](#).