

## Getting Involved in Professional Organizations: A Gateway to Career Advancement

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In the rapidly changing context of twenty-first-century psychology, graduate students and early career professionals have many options for career development. While membership in professional associations has historically been an unquestioned step to career development, that is no longer true. According to the 2019 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report, the number of membership associations still growing dropped 7 percent in the last 10 years, and about 26 percent saw a decrease in membership in 2019 (Scott, 2019). So, the question remains, should graduate students and early career professionals join membership organizations? The authors enthusiastically answer this question in the affirmative. It is our belief that psychological organizations foster personal and professional development, professional networking, and opportunities to serve the discipline and society at large. Since the late 1800s, psychologists around the world have been organizing themselves into psychological associations to promote clinical, research, or personal interests. The great variety of psychological associations that exist today offer unique opportunities to network, share research, exchange ideas, and learn about critical developments in the field. This chapter will briefly describe relevant aspects of psychological organizations and provide some examples of specific opportunities they offer to graduate students and early-career psychologists.

This chapter is dedicated to our former co-author, Raymond D. Fowler, PhD (1930–2015). We both had the privilege of working with Ray when we were executive staff members under his leadership as the Chief Executive Officer (1989–2003) at the American Psychological Association (APA). Ray was a true champion for graduate students and was committed to creating meaningful opportunities for future psychologists to be actively involved in all aspects of APA's functioning. Because of Ray, the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students was formed in 1988, during his tenure as President of APA, to give graduate students a powerful voice in shaping the association that they would inherit. We will forever be grateful to Ray for the support, mentorship, leadership, and friendship he gave to us.

## 1. Professional Organizations in Psychology

Professional associations seek to advance the body of knowledge in their fields, keep their members informed of professional developments, and provide a variety of services to their members and to the public at large (Fowler, 1999). Joining an association can be a critical aspect of career development for new professionals. As far back as 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville noted the tendency of Americans to join together to form voluntary associations. “Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations,” he noted, “They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds” (1835). De Tocqueville’s assessment continues to be true. With over 23,000 national organizations and 141,000 regional, state, and local organizations and chapters to choose from, 70 percent of American adults belong to at least one association, 25 percent belong to four or more, and 20 percent belong to a professional organization (Ernstthal & Jones, 2001; Purcell & Smith, 2011). Psychology contributes its fair share to this proliferation of organizations. Because the American Psychological Association (APA) is the world’s largest psychological organization, many examples will be drawn from that organization, but APA is only one piece of the discussion.

### 1.1 National and International Psychological Organizations

As early as 1889, psychologists had begun meeting with colleagues from other universities and cities at international congresses (Pickren & Fowler, 2003). By 1892, the first national psychological organization, the APA, was founded. Since then, psychological associations have been founded in every continent but Antarctica, and national organizations for psychologists exist in over 80 countries (Pickren & Fowler, 2003; International Union of Psychological Science, 2021a, 2021b). This expansion created both broadly focused national psychological organizations and more narrowly focused societies specializing in specific professional concerns (see Table 21.1). The latter organizations are comprised of psychologists with similar research interests (e.g., Society of Experimental Social Psychology), applied interests (e.g., Association of Practicing Psychologists), administrative responsibilities (e.g., Society of Psychologists in Management), and employment settings (e.g., National Organization of VA Psychologists) (VandenBos, 1989). Other organizations are based not just on the members’ professional responsibilities, but also on their demographic characteristics and how they identify themselves. These include organizations for students (e.g., the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students, APAGS), ethnic minorities (e.g., Society of Indian Psychologists), and geographic locations (e.g., California Psychological Association, Middle Eastern Psychological Network). Finally, many psychologists participate in organizations whose membership includes other disciplines, such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) or the English Association for Child Psychology and Psychiatry (ACPP).

Table 21.1 *Illustrative list of psychological associations****Canadian Psychological Associations***

Psychological Association of Alberta  
 British Columbia Psychological Association  
 Psychological Association of Manitoba  
 Manitoba Psychological Society, Inc.  
 College of Psychologists of New Brunswick  
 Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia  
 Association of Psychologists of the NW Territories  
 Ontario Psychological Association  
 Corp. Prof. Des Psychologues du Quebec  
 Saskatchewan Psychological Association  
 Psychological Society of Saskatchewan  
 Association of New Foundland Psychologists  
 Psychological Association of Prince Edwards Island

***U.S. Regional Psychological Associations***

Eastern Psychological Association  
 Midwestern Psychological Association  
 New England Psychological Association  
 Southeastern Psychological Association  
 Southwestern Psychological Association  
 Western Psychological Association

***Affiliated State Psychological Associations***

Alabama  
 Alaska  
 Arizona  
 Arkansas  
 California  
 Colorado  
 Connecticut  
 Delaware  
 District of Columbia  
 Florida  
 Georgia  
 Hawaii  
 Idaho  
 Illinois  
 Indiana  
 Iowa  
 Kansas  
 Kentucky  
 Louisiana  
 Maine  
 Maryland  
 Massachusetts  
 Michigan  
 Minnesota

*(continued)*

Table 21.1 (*continued*)

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Mississippi  
 Missouri  
 Montana  
 Nebraska  
 Nevada  
 New Hampshire  
 New Jersey  
 New Mexico  
 New York  
 North Carolina  
 North Dakota  
 Ohio  
 Oklahoma  
 Oregon  
 Pennsylvania  
 Puerto Rico  
 Rhode Island  
 South Carolina  
 South Dakota  
 Tennessee  
 Texas  
 Utah  
 Vermont  
 Virginia  
 Washington  
 West Virginia  
 Wisconsin  
 Wyoming

***International Psychological Associations***

International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS)  
 International Association of Applied Psychology (IAPP)  
 European Federation of Professional Psychologists Association (EFPPA)  
 Interamerican Society of Psychology (ISP)  
 International Council of Psychologists (ICP)

***Interdisciplinary Groups with Strong Psychological Interface***

American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)  
 American Education Research Association (AERA)  
 Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD)  
 Gerontological Society of America (GSA)  
 Cognitive Science Society  
 Society for Neuroscience  
 Human Factors Society  
 National Mental Health Association (NMHA)  
 World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH)  
 Society for Psychotherapy Research  
 Acoustical Society of America  
 American Pain Society

*(continued)*

Table 21.1 (*continued*)

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Behavior Genetics Association
International Society of Hypnosis
American Correctional Association
Association for Behavior Analysis
International Brain Research Organization
American Psychopathological Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Evaluation Association
Academy of Management
Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
Association for the Psychophysiological Study of Sleep
Society for the Advancement of Field Therapy
American Society of Group Psychotherapy & Psychodrama
Association of Business Simulation & Experimental Learning
Association of Mental Health Administrators
Biofeedback Society of America
Comm. On Rehabilitation Counselor Certification
International Society of Research on Aggression
International Society for Psychological Research
International Society for Research on Emotion
Society for Clinical & Experimental Hypnosis
Society for Exploration of Psychotherapy Intervention
Society for Reproductive & Infant Psychology
Society for the Scientific Study of Sex
International Society for Mental Imagery Techniques in Psychotherapy & Psychology
Society for Professionals in Dispute Resolution
Association for Gifted-Creative Children

***Student Organizations***

American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS)  
 Psi Chi  
 Psi Beta

***Education and Training Groups***

Council of Graduate Departments of Psychology (COGDOP)  
 National Council of Schools of Professional Psychology (NCSPP)  
 Association of Psychology Internship Centers (APIC)  
 Council of Training Directors (CTD)  
 Council of Undergraduate Psychology Programs (CUPP)  
 Association of Medical School Professors of Psychology (AMSPP)  
 Council of Teachers of Undergraduate Psychology (CTUP)  
 Joint Council on Professional Education in Psychology (JCPEP)

***Credentialing and Licensing Organizations***

American Association of State Psychological Boards (AASPB)  
 American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP)  
 National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology

*(continued)*

Table 21.1 (*continued*)***Ethnic Minority Psychological Associations***

Asian American Psychological Association  
 Association of Black Psychologists  
 National Hispanic Psychological Association  
 Society of Indian Psychologists

***Other Psychological Associations***

Psychonomic Society, Inc.  
 Society of Experimental Psychologists  
 Society for Multivariate Experimental psychology  
 Society for Computers in Psychology  
 Society for Mathematical Psychology  
 American Psychological Society (APS)  
 Psychometric Society  
 National Academy of Practice in Psychology  
 National Association for School Psychologists (NASP)  
 American Association for Correctional Psychologists  
 Association of Practicing Psychologists  
 Society of Psychologists in Addictive Behaviors  
 American Academy of Forensic Psychology  
 National Organization of VA Psychologists (NOVA Psi)  
 Society of Psychologists in Substance Abuse  
 Psychologists in Long-Term Care  
 Society of Air Force Clinical Psychologists  
 Association for Jungian Psychology  
 North American Society of Adlerian Psychology  
 Society of Psychologists in Management  
 Association of Applied Social Psychologists  
 Association for the Advancement of Applied Sports Psychology  
 Psychologists for Social responsibility  
 Association of Women in Psychology  
 Association of Lesbian and Gay psychologists  
 Society of Experimental Social Psychology

From VandenBos (1989)

**1.2 The Function of Professional Organizations within Psychology**

All organizations have a mission statement governing their activities. APA's mission statement, for example, is "Advancing psychology to benefit society and improve lives," while the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP)'s mission is "to promote the science and practice of applied psychology and to facilitate interaction and communication among applied psychologists around the world" (APA, 2021a; IAAP, 2021). Most psychological associations adhere to a similar mission of advancing the field to benefit science and society. How they pursue these missions, of course, varies tremendously. APA, for example, recently outlined a strategic plan to describe its vision for implementing its mission (Table 21.2).

Table 21.2 *American Psychological Association Strategic Plan* ([www.apa.org/about/apa/strategic-plan](http://www.apa.org/about/apa/strategic-plan))

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**VISION**

The change APA aspires to create in the world.  
A strong, diverse, and unified psychology that enhances knowledge and improves the human condition.

**MISSION**

APA’s unique role in creating that change.  
To promote the advancement, communication, and application of psychological science and knowledge to benefit society and improve lives.

**Guiding Principles**

The core values that must inform and infuse everything APA does. They apply equally across all areas of psychology including practice, basic and applied research, applied psychology, and education and training.

**Build on a foundation of science.**

Ensure that the best available psychological science informs policies, programs, products, and services.

**Advocate for psychology and psychologists.**

Demonstrate an unwavering commitment to promoting the field while supporting and unifying those who make it their profession.

**Champion diversity and inclusion.**

Further the understanding and appreciation of differences and be inclusive in everything we do.

**Respect and promote human rights.**

Focus on human rights, fairness, and dignity for all segments of society.

**Engage with and deliver value to members.**

Provide resources, opportunities, and networks that help all members at every stage of their careers.

**Lead by example.**

Serve others, model integrity, and demonstrate the highest ethical standards in all our actions.

**Operating Principles**

How all parts of APA will work together to execute the plan.

**Make an impact.**

Focus on efforts with the scale and scope to significantly advance the interests of the public, the field, and psychology professionals.

**Embrace a global perspective.**

Advance psychology globally through international engagement, association efforts, and meaningful collaborations.

(continued)

Table 21.2 (continued)

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**Build a stronger association.**

Collaborate across APA to align resources, decision-making, and the contributions of governance, advisory groups, staff, and the broader membership with the strategic plan.

**Increase organizational effectiveness.**

Focus on the future, make data-informed decisions, invest in strategic priorities, create capacity for new initiatives, and emphasize outcomes.

**Strategic Goals and Objectives**

Goals are the high-level descriptions of what APA must achieve to be successful. To some degree, they are aspirational in that they are wide-ranging, complex, and ongoing. Objectives are more specific and address the component pieces of each goal.

**Utilize psychology to make a positive impact on critical societal issues.**

- Employ psychology to improve population health, increase access to services, and reduce disparities.
- Promote the application of psychological science to the development and adaptive use of new technologies that affect people's lives.
- Use psychology to improve the functioning of public and private institutions, organizations, systems, and communities.
- Increase the influence of psychology on policy decisions at the international, national, state, and local levels.
- Foster the advancement of human rights, fairness, diversity, and inclusion through the application of psychological science.

**Prepare the discipline and profession of psychology for the future.**

- Attract, diversify, develop, and support the next generation of psychology professionals.
- Protect and increase funding for applied psychology, education, practice, basic, applied, and clinical research, and training.
- Facilitate greater alignment between the science and practice of psychology.
- Promote the adoption of new technologies and methodologies in psychology and guide their integration into the discipline and profession.
- Ensure that psychology functions as a hub of interdisciplinary collaboration.

**Elevate the public's understanding of, regard for, and use of psychology.**

- Expand the public's perception of psychology to accurately reflect the full breadth of the field.
- Influence educational systems to foster lifelong appreciation and application of psychology.
- Make psychological science accessible and understandable to the public and key decision makers.
- Distinguish psychology's unique contributions in health, health care, and human welfare.
- Become a go-to organization for the public regarding the quality and effectiveness of psychology-related products and services.

**Strengthen APA's standing as an authoritative voice for psychology.**

- Expand APA's position as a premier provider of science, practice, education, and career resources for psychology.
  - Establish, uphold, and embody the ethical standards for the profession and discipline nationally.
  - Increase the impact of APA's legislative, regulatory, marketplace, and social welfare advocacy.
  - Serve as a leading resource for standards and evidence-based guidelines for the field.
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One of the primary means of advancing the profession is through the advancement of knowledge. To that end, most organizations sponsor regular conferences that serve as opportunities to exchange information about recent advances in practice and research. Both IAAP and the International Union of Psychological Sciences (IUPsyS), for example, hold meetings every four years, while the European Federation of Professional Psychology Associations (EFPA) meets every other year (Fowler, 2000). Other organizations, such as APA, hold yearly conventions. During the 2020–2021 COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations experimented with virtual conferences or extended webinar series as a substitute for face-to-face meetings. By and large, these new formats permitted members who might otherwise not have been able to travel to participate in an in-person event to benefit from the rich content.

Journals also advance the knowledge of the field through their role in exchanging information. Nearly every national organization publishes a journal tailored to the interests of its members. These organizational journals are typically available in virtual or print formats with several additional journals being online only. Like conferences, these journals provide an opportunity for members to share their own expertise and to benefit from the expertise of others as well as to contribute to the literature of the discipline. For instance, APA's Division 44, Society for the Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, publishes *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, a quarterly scholarly journal dedicated to the dissemination of information and research that impacts practice, education, public policy, and social action related to LGBTQ+ issues.

In addition to their journals, many organizations offer hard copy and virtual newsletters containing information in a more succinct and readable format. Whether they take the form of magazines, like the *APA Monitor on Psychology*, a more traditional newsletter format or a topical approach like the Society for Research in Child Development's (SRCD) *Social Policy Report Briefs*, these newsletters serve a vital information-sharing function. Without newsletters, journals, and conferences, no psychologist, regardless of their training, would remain competent in the field for more than a few years after completing graduate school.

Beyond information sharing, psychological organizations serve several other critical functions. As Pickren and Fowler (2003) point out, these organizations serve several "gatekeeping" functions. They may determine who can call themselves psychologists or identify themselves as experts in a subspecialty of the field. Through accreditation of continuing education classes, they can influence what people study after completing their degrees, and what they can get credit for studying. In many countries, membership in the national psychological organizations is a prerequisite for licensure. Their journals and conferences also determine what information is communicated to the field and how credible it will be when it is disseminated. Fortunately, most organizations exercise this power wisely, because they are themselves governed by the psychologists who make up their membership. In addition, most societies have a complex system of checks and balances that help the system function fairly and democratically (Fowler, 1999).

## **2. Why Join? Benefits of Psychological Organizations for Individuals**

### **2.1 A Professional Home**

Professional associations, quite simply, provide psychologists with a way to remain current in the field and to develop their professional identity. Without them, psychologists would function in a vacuum. Beyond those global benefits, however, professional associations provide many less obvious ones. In the first place, they provide a place where like-minded psychologists can come together to focus on the issues of most importance to them. Many associations are organized around the unique characteristics and interests of their members. Examples include the Association of Black Psychologists, the Asian-American Psychological Association, the Association of Lesbian and Gay Psychologists, and the Association of Women in Psychology. The 60 state, provincial, and territorial associations affiliated with APA represent a vital home for many psychologists. Other associations organize themselves around topics of interest, such as the Society of Psychologists in Addictive Behaviors or the Association for Jungian Psychology. APA's 54 divisions also reflect a wide array of interests from experimental psychology to psychological hypnosis to the study of sexual and gender identity. In all cases, people choose to affiliate with these specialized groups to find a professional home. Professional associations and their divisions and affiliates serve that function.

### **2.2 National and International Cross-Pollination**

In addition to providing a professional home, these associations can create unique networks for cross-national and even international collaboration. The APA, for example, has initiated the MOU (memoranda of understanding) Partner Program, which promotes collaborative relationships with national psychology associations around the world to share resources, develop opportunities for discussion and exchange, and foster a productive alliance. This program provides opportunities to build international partnerships and create opportunities for APA and APAGS members to be exposed to organized psychology outside of the US through attending conferences, workshops and other activities hosted by MOU partner associations. In recent years, the program has sent delegations to Colombia, Mexico, South Africa, Ireland, Portugal, England, and Germany (APA, 2020). These cross-pollination opportunities strengthen the field by creating international linkages and compelling psychologists to look at issues from the perspectives of different nations and cultures. The cognitive behavioral approach so dominant in the US, for example, is less-favored in many other countries, so collaboration engenders broader perspectives on methodology and theory as well as application.

### 2.3 Interaction with Leaders and Potential Mentors

Interaction with colleagues is a vital component of professional development. Professional organizations offer an excellent opportunity for emerging psychologists to associate with other psychologists and develop their own professional identity. Through that interaction, graduate students and early-career psychologists gain access to content experts and potential mentors while developing a sense of belonging within their discipline. Only at national conferences are young professionals likely to interact with renowned researchers and have the opportunity to hear them speak. The leaders in the field, regardless of the specific domain or subdiscipline, typically belong to national organizations. After all, it is primarily through the mechanisms organizations provide, such as journals, conferences, and online interactive webinars, that leaders in the field emerge.

These meetings provide one additional benefit to young psychologists and graduate students. At most of the conferences sponsored by professional societies, students can be part of panels or can present their research at poster sessions. In this way, they contribute to the meetings as well as benefiting from them.

### 2.4 Resources

Many organizations offer a wealth of resources to their members. In addition to the primary journals that are usually a benefit of membership, many organizations offer additional journals for more specialized interests. In addition to the *American Psychologist*, which goes to every APA member, APA publishes over 60 hard and virtual journals. Publishing with APA, for example, provides a valuable link to a community of hundreds of Editors and Associate Editors, and more than 70,000 editorial board members and reviewers who select and publish approximately 5000 articles each year (APA, 2021b). Other informational resources include newsletters, books, electronic information databases such as PsychINFO, and web-based resources.

The resources offered by these national organizations extend far beyond what may typically come to mind. The Ethics Office at APA, for example, provides guidance through written materials, websites, and staff members who are subject matter experts on ethical questions that arise in research and practice settings, as well as other dilemmas that may occur during graduate school (i.e., harassment or dual-role questions). Several organizations also provide guidance on issues regarding human subjects and animal research. Another resource at APA is the Office of Testing, which serves as a source of information about the use of tests and assessments in clinical, counseling, educational, and employment settings. In yet another example, the APA Center for Workforce Studies conducts ongoing studies that provide timely statistics on students entering and graduating from psychology doctoral programs, psychologists' salaries, employment settings, marketplace trends and more (see [www.apa.org/workforce](https://www.apa.org/workforce)). Other resources available through psychological organizations range from employment assistance to financial assistance for students.

## **2.5 Fellowships, Awards, Scholarships, and Grants**

Many national organizations provide unique opportunities for their members to receive various fellowships, scholarships, grants and awards. For example, each year APA's graduate student group, APAGS, grants competitive scholarships to graduate students in psychology and awards of excellence to graduate students, mentors, and psychology departments (see [www.apa.org/apags](http://www.apa.org/apags)). Many other student scholarships, grants, and awards of recognition are sponsored by various national, state, and local psychological associations, as well as divisions of larger organizations (for other examples within APA, see [www.apa.org/students](http://www.apa.org/students)). In addition, organizations such as APA and SRCD sponsor fellowships for doctoral-level professionals to come to Washington, DC for a year and participate in the policymaking process through work at federal agencies, congressional offices, or a national organization's policy office ([www.apa.org/about/awards/congress-fellow](http://www.apa.org/about/awards/congress-fellow)). These Fellowships are open, but not limited to, early-career psychologists, who often compete successfully for these positions.

## **3. Benefits of Psychological Organizations to Society**

### **3.1 National Initiatives**

Many individual psychologists have something to contribute to our social welfare and wish to do so, but lack a mechanism for sharing their knowledge or time. National organizations are well positioned to develop initiatives that can impact society at a broader level. Two recent APA projects serve as examples of the kind of initiatives only a large organization can undertake. In 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, APA launched "Equity Flattens the Curve." This initiative was "based on the assumption that to combat the pandemic we must tackle the bias, stigma, and discrimination at the root of inequities and ensure that all strategies and solutions are delivered equitably." The initiative focused on four common goals:

1. Reduce bias, stigma, and discrimination related to the COVID-19 pandemic to advance health equity.
2. Connect voices in health equity, public health, and psychology to educate policymakers and leaders about how centering equity can flatten the curve.
3. Promote social cohesion, inclusion, and equity to slow the spread of the virus.
4. Promote policies and practices that reduce inequity and address public health needs of diverse populations now and in the future.

This initiative encompassed many actions including information sharing opportunities for APA members, a virtual resource center, expert working groups, and a networking platform to facilitate community engagement.

In 2020, APA also established a Climate Change Task Force for the purpose of strengthening the role of psychology in addressing global climate change. These kinds of initiatives leverage association resources to address large-scale challenges in

ways that would be impossible for individual psychologists, no matter how talented. Plus, they provide ways for early-career psychologists to engage in topics of national and international significance.

### 3.2 Advocacy for Psychological Research and Practice

Legislation and regulation have a significant impact on all areas of psychology. Many national organizations have Washington-based policy offices that advocate on behalf of psychological research and practice. Given the constant battle for recognition of the value of behavioral and social science research, these efforts are critical to the field of psychology. Psychologists and psychology graduate students who have received funding for their research from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Science Foundation (NSF), or other federal agencies probably have the policy staff of a professional organization to thank for their money. National organizations with practitioner members also focus a great deal of effort on issues of interest to clinicians, such as parity in insurance coverage between mental health and physical health. These efforts may also include special attention to the needs of graduate students. In this regard, APA lobbies actively for funding for the Minority Fellowship Program, which supports graduate students of color, and for other loan reimbursement and scholarship programs for psychology graduate students. The voice of national psychological organizations is critical in these efforts, as most of these programs focused exclusively on medical professions and excluded psychology until recently.

Although much of this advocacy provides direct benefit to psychologists and psychology graduate students, that is not always the aim. Some organizations, such as APA or SRCD, also advocate for programs and services benefiting the populations psychologists serve and research. As an example, APA and SRCD have both been highly involved in the reauthorizations of the federal Head Start and Elementary and Secondary Education programs. Although these programs do not necessarily benefit psychology directly, the work of psychologists is critical to the understanding of both social and cognitive development. For that reason, these organizations were willing to allocate resources to inform policymakers about relevant research so that federal policy might reflect current knowledge from the field.

It is not only paid advocacy staff who effect policy change. National organizations provide opportunities for their members to become involved in the process as well. Following the Columbine shootings, for example, nearly a dozen psychologists were invited to testify before the Senate Commerce and Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committees, the House Judiciary Committee, the Congressional Children's Caucus, and at a special closed briefing for members of Congress and their staff convened by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA) through the auspices of the APA. In recent years, psychologists representing various national organizations have testified before Congress on issues such as child maltreatment, women's health, terrorism response, and the COVID-19

pandemic. These testimonies can have great influence on the congressional committees developing federal initiatives.

While testifying before Congress is an exciting opportunity, it is also a rare one. Many other opportunities exist, however, for psychology graduate students and psychologists to become involved in policymaking. Most national organizations have electronic listservs, newsletters, and other vehicles for keeping their members informed about current policy issues affecting their work and providing them with information about how to get involved on a particular issue. Many State Psychological Associations also have advocacy initiatives they are promoting at the state and local level. These include parity initiatives, questions about independent licensure, and other issues of local interest. Typically, any member of a society can get involved in these efforts by signing up for an electronic or fax list.

#### **4. Getting Involved**

Most of the discussion above focuses on what organizations do for their members or do on behalf of their members. It is important to remember that there is also a great deal that members can do to engage with their organizations. For example, most organizations have multiple opportunities for members to get involved in and influence the leadership of the organizations. The decisions of members, whether expressed directly or through elected representatives, set the policies and direction of their associations. Because organizations need the participation and guidance of their members to function, most organizations have multiple boards, committees, and councils to govern their activities. These groups are made up of members of the association who are elected by the general membership, elected by a subset of the membership, or selected by other members of the association because of the unique contribution they can make. To illustrate further the variety of opportunities and mechanisms for involvement, it may be helpful to examine one organization in more detail. Because of their familiarity with the organization, the authors have chosen to use APA for that purpose.

##### **4.1 APA: A Case Study**

Many psychologists find professional organizations to be a vital part of their careers. With over 121,000 members and affiliates, APA is the largest association in the world representing organized psychology. APA members are primarily doctoral-level psychologists, about a third of whom are employed in educational settings, a third in private clinical practice, and a third in other settings such as hospitals, clinics, business, industry, and government (Fowler, 2002), and psychology graduate students. Affiliates include high school teachers of psychology, master's level mental health professionals, psychologists in other countries, and others.

After beginning as an academic-focused organization, APA reorganized in 1945 to incorporate several smaller psychological organizations, evolving into a new organization with a mission that included both professional and scientific issues, as



well as the application of psychology to the public interest (see Table 21.2). Over time, a multifaceted structure that included divisions and state psychological associations developed, reflecting the diversity of the field and APA's members. Today, APA has approximately 500 employees, publishes a number of highly respected journals, has a respected book publishing arm, holds an annual convention attended by 8000–12,000 people, provides a monthly magazine to members, and houses multiple offices to address a variety of issues with the goal of advancing psychology as a science and profession in the legislative, public, academic, and research realms (Fowler, 2000; APA 2021b).

## 4.2 Divisional Involvement and Officers

Beyond the activities mentioned above, psychological associations such as APA offers many other benefits to its members. For example, students may participate in a variety of meetings and conferences, including the annual APA convention, or join any of APA's 54 divisions, enabling them to associate with psychologists and student colleagues who share similar professional interests. Divisions range in size from 300 to 7500 members, with each focusing on a clinical or research interest, or some personal or other factor. Often the personal and research interests overlap – for example, APA has divisions on school psychology, developmental psychology, and child clinical psychology – so these categories are clearly not exclusive. All the divisions have officers and executive committees (sometimes referred to as boards). These committees provide excellent opportunities to learn about association leadership and to influence the direction of the division. Furthermore, a majority of the Divisions include a graduate student representative on the executive committee, with the depth of graduate students increasing yearly. All Divisions also have newsletters that frequently welcome articles from the membership, providing opportunities for students and early-career professionals to contribute to scientific, although not necessarily peer-reviewed, publications. Some divisions also have divisional journals or other publications that provide information on the domain of interest to the members and provide additional publishing opportunities. Detailed information about APA's divisions are linked through [www.apa.org/divisions](http://www.apa.org/divisions).

Much of the work of the Association is completed by member volunteers who serve on APA's various Boards and Committees. These groups report to the Council of Representatives, APA's most powerful governance group. Boards and Committees carry out a wide range of tasks as evidenced by their names (see Table 21.3) and may frequently have student members or liaisons. Association activities and interests are not limited to the topics of the various continuing Boards and Committees. APA Task Forces and Ad Hoc Committees are formed to address time-limited or newly identified issues that are important to APA members and to psychology in general. Some examples of recent Task Forces and Ad Hoc Committees include: the Ad Hoc Committee on Early Career Psychologists, the Task Force on Psychology in Early Education and Care, the Advisory Committee on Colleague Assistance, the Work Group on Professional Practice Issues in Telehealth, the Working Group on Children's Mental Health, the Electronic Resources Advisory Committee, the Task

Force on Serious Mental Illness/Severe Emotional Disturbance, the Joint Committee on Testing Practices, and the Task Force on Statistical Inference, just to name a few. Members of these groups can usually be self-nominated or nominated by peers, and graduate students should not be reluctant to nominate themselves for graduate student slots on these committees. Early-career professionals should also consider volunteering to serve on these groups as well.

Table 21.3 *APA boards and committees*

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1.	Board for the Advancement of Psychology in the Public Interest
2.	Board of Convention Affairs
3.	Board of Educational Affairs
4.	Board of Professional Affairs
5.	Board of Educational Affairs
6.	Board of Scientific Affairs
7.	Policy and Planning Board
8.	Publications and Communications Board
9.	Elections Committee
10.	Ethics Committee
11.	Finance Committee
12.	Membership Committee
13.	Committee on Structure and Function of Council
14.	Agenda Planning Group
15.	College of Professional Psychology
16.	Commission for the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Professional Psychology
17.	Committee on Division/APA Relations
18.	Committee on International Relations in Psychology
19.	Investment Committee
20.	Committee for the Advancement of Professional Practice
21.	Committee for the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students
22.	Council of Editors
23.	Committee on Accreditation
24.	Committee on Education and Training Awards
25.	Continuing Professional Education Committee
26.	Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools
27.	Committee on Professional Practice and Standards
28.	Committee on Animal Research and Ethics
29.	Committee on Psychological Tests and Assessment
30.	Committee on Scientific Awards
31.	Committee on Aging
32.	Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs
33.	Committee on Urban Initiatives
34.	Committee on Women in Psychology
35.	Committee on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns
36.	Committee on Disability Issues in Psychology
37.	Committee on Children, Youth and Families
38.	Committee on Psychology in the Public Interest Awards
39.	Committee on Rural Health

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5. APAGS – The American Psychological Association of Graduate Students

The discussion above only provides a few of the opportunities for involvement that exist at APA. For graduate students, of course, there is a specific avenue for greater involvement. The American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS) was organized in 1988 and has become the single largest constituency group in the Association (see Table 21.4 for the APAGS mission statement).

APAGS initial membership of 18,000 has grown to approximately 35,000 members in its 23 years of existence, representing one third of the current APA membership. Over the years, the list of APAGS activities has lengthened tremendously and its level of integration into the Association has substantially increased. Through participation in governance initiatives and policies, APAGS provides direct student contact and support, develops resources to meet the information and advocacy needs of students, provides leadership opportunities, and offers special convention programming and other distinct training for students.

5.1 Involvement in APAGS

There are numerous opportunities for students to become actively involved in APAGS and develop their leadership talents. Students can run for an elected position on the APAGS Committee, or on one of APAGS subcommittee. Some of the past subcommittees have included the Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs; the Committee on Students with Disability Issues; the Convention Committee; the Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns; and the Advocacy Coordinating Team (ACT), which focuses on national and state legislation that impacts psychology.

5.2 APAGS and Career Development

APAGS offers programs and information on topics such as: the business aspects of psychology; internship; post-doctoral training; completing your dissertation; finding

Table 21.4 *The mission statement of the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS)*

The APAGS Committee shall:

- Promote the highest standards in the research, teaching and practice of psychology to further the education and development of all psychology students;
- Represent all graduate study specialties of psychology, facilitating information exchange between these groups;
- Promote leadership development to communicate and advocate for students’ concerns; and
- Establish and maintain channels of communication between APAGS and schools, universities, training centers, institutions and other members of the psychological community.

a mentor; balancing work and career; negotiating job offers; presenting and publishing research; and various career paths in psychology. In addition, APAGS information is accessible through the APA website and there is a plethora of resources to help students and early career psychologists prepare for licensure, understand basic business strategies to build an independent practice, get on insurance panels, obtain grants, and pursue the tenure track (see [www.apa.org/earlycareer/](http://www.apa.org/earlycareer/) and [www.apa.org/apags](http://www.apa.org/apags)).

## 6. Conclusions

The authors believe strongly that participation in a psychological organization is a vital part of developing and maintaining a career in psychology. These organizations offer psychologists professional benefits through their journals, conferences, employment assistance, guidance on ethical standards, and other resources. They offer personal benefits through opportunities for networking, finding mentors, and receiving scholarships, fellowships, and other awards. Furthermore, these organizations offer an avenue for psychologists at any stage of their careers to make a contribution to the field. They contribute in a global sense by supporting an organization that is furthering critical national initiatives and advocacy efforts. More importantly, they provide opportunities to contribute at an individual level by becoming involved in leadership positions, speaking or presenting posters at conferences, contributing to journals and newsletters, or becoming an advocate. Different benefits will be most salient to different people, but all of them together provide ample evidence that membership in a psychological organization is an investment that yields rich dividends.

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