

Working for you: Member Engagement Committee

By Rebecca Bishop, DVM, MS, PhD, DACVS-LA

The AAEP's Member Engagement Committee (MEC) connects members with meaningful opportunities to contribute their time, expertise and passion to the association. Representing a wide range of practice types, career stages and backgrounds, the 18 members of the committee work to ensure that AAEP volunteer opportunities align with the interests, skills and goals of our diverse and enthusiastic membership.

Volunteerism plays a critical role in AAEP's success and supports the association's leadership pipeline. Whether serving on a committee, contributing to educational resources, participating in outreach initiatives or helping at convention events, engaged members help shape the future of the profession and the association.

Modernizing volunteer recruitment

A major initiative in 2025-2026 has been the development and implementation of a new Volunteer Interest Form and recruitment process. The association routinely has more qualified and enthusiastic volunteers than available positions, which underscores the importance of ensuring that volunteer opportunities are matched thoughtfully with members' skills, expertise and passions.

Historically, identifying volunteers often relied heavily on outdated information. The new process allows members to update their interests on a regular basis, helping AAEP better connect volunteers with opportunities that fit their current professional circumstances and areas of enthusiasm. The committee is also partnering with committee chairs to better define volunteer needs and communicate those opportunities directly to members.

Building future volunteers

Recognizing that leadership development begins early, the committee has developed a "Junior Committee Member" initiative for veterinary students. These positions will provide students with opportunities to participate in selected AAEP committees—contributing their perspectives, assisting with activities and beginning to build lifelong habits of volunteer engagement.

This program is designed to strengthen the transition from student involvement to active AAEP membership while creating a pipeline of future leaders for the organization and profession.

Supporting foreign graduates

Working in collaboration with The Foundation for the Horse in 2026, the MEC has evaluated existing scholarship programs and resources available to foreign veterinary graduates pursuing U.S. accreditation and licensure.

Current efforts include exploring ways to broaden scholarship support beyond examination fees to include educational boot camps, externships, travel and housing assistance; reviewing existing educational resources; and seeking partnerships that can help foreign veterinary graduates success-



The MEC-supported Early Career Practitioners' Reception at the convention provides an opportunity for newer practitioners to connect with colleagues, mentors and AAEP leaders.

fully navigate the licensure process and become active participants in the equine veterinary community.

Broadening AAEP's reach

This year, the MEC examined membership models used by other veterinary organizations. The tactical goal is to help identify opportunities to demonstrate AAEP's value to groups that may not currently be fully engaged, including academic veterinarians, graduate students, interns and mixed-animal practitioners with an equine interest. We will soon begin conversations with veterinary school faculty to better understand barriers to membership and engagement.

The overarching goal is to ensure that AAEP remains welcoming, relevant and beneficial throughout every stage of a horse doctor's career.

Creating convention connections

At the upcoming AAEP Convention in Las Vegas, the committee is introducing an interactive networking activity designed to help first-time attendees navigate the meeting and build meaningful professional connections. The broader goal is to foster engagement across the entire membership by creating opportunities for introductions, conversations and relationship-building among attendees of all career stages. It is hoped that this initiative will make the convention more approachable for newcomers while strengthening the sense of community that has long been a hallmark of AAEP membership.

Looking ahead

As AAEP continues to grow and evolve, the MEC remains focused on one central objective: helping every member find a meaningful place to contribute. By expanding volunteer pathways, supporting future members and leaders, strengthening recruitment and fostering connections across the profession, the committee works to ensure that AAEP remains a vibrant community where members can engage, serve and thrive.

Dr. Bishop is chair of the Member Engagement Committee.