

STFM Guide for Chairs of Committees, Task Forces, and Groups

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Through the years, the activities of the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine have included a considerable number and variety of groups to address issues of interest to STFM members. In the evolution of this group process, policies and procedures have developed that affect the activities and actions of these various groups. This guide will acquaint you with those policies and procedures to help maximize your effectiveness in your important leadership role.

The Society of Teachers of Family Medicine has six standing committees through which many of its activities are conducted: Communications, Education, Legislative Affairs, Membership, Program, and Research. The chair of each of these committees sits on the Society's Board of Directors, which directs and administers the organization on behalf of the membership.

The Society's Bylaws and policies allow for the development of a variety of special interest groups, ad hoc committees, special committees, and task forces to address specific questions and issues of interest to STFM members. These groups serve an important role within STFM, fostering scholarship and networking around a specific topic, leadership development, and production of monographs, curricular guidelines, meeting presentations, etc. The definitions of those bodies follows.

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STFM Core Purpose and Core Values

Core Purpose: Advancing Family Medicine to Improve Health Through a Community of Teachers and Scholars

Core Values: Integrity, Relationship-centered, Openness, Nurturing, Excellence, Learning

Groups

Groups, often referred to as “groups on...,” define ongoing interest groups of members of the Society. The group’s purpose is defined by its members, and specific written goals are submitted to the Board with the request for forming a new group. A group is approved by the Board for a 1-year term, which can be renewed indefinitely by the Board as long as there remains adequate interest among the members. Renewal requires a report, including goals and objectives, to the Board by the group chair. The chair is approved by the president on an annual basis on the recommendation of the members of the group. As a means to develop future STFM leaders and give as many individuals as possible an opportunity to serve in this STFM leadership role, the STFM Board encourages groups to elect new chairs every 2–4 years.

Group membership is open to all members who wish to join, and membership may continue for the duration of the group. A description of each group’s activities is published in the STFM annual report. Any budget request for a group must be for a specified purpose with the request submitted in writing to the group’s Board liaison for Board approval. A Board member will be appointed by the president to serve as the liaison to the group.

All members of the STFM committees, task forces, and groups must be members of the Society. Nonmembers who wish to participate as members of these bodies are required to join STFM.

Ad Hoc Committees

The president, with the approval of the Board of Directors, appoints such committees or commissions as may be needed from time to time, with purposes and duties as delegated to them by the Board. The president designates the chairs of such groups, and they are designed to serve in ad hoc capacities, reporting to the Board. The president also appoints a Board member to serve as the liaison to the committee.

Special Committees

Special committees are set up to address a specific purpose as defined by the Board of Directors. They serve at the discretion of the Board, with a structure defined at the time the Board approves the special committee. The chair is appointed by the president, with approval from the Board. Unless specifically stated otherwise in the *STFM Policy Manual*, a special committee will be appointed for no longer than a 2-year term, and membership on the committee will be governed by the same rules as membership on a standing committee. A Board member will be appointed by the president to serve as the liaison to the committee.

Task Forces

Task forces are task-oriented committees formed to complete a defined function. Task force chairs are appointed by the president and approved by the Board. The task force chair appoints the membership on the task force. Specific goals and a timetable for completion of those goals must be submitted to the Board for approval prior to beginning the task force’s activities. Approval by the Board constitutes an appointment of the task force and its chair for a period of time sufficient to complete the defined goals. A task force can be approved for any length of time, up to a maximum of 2 years, and requires reapplication to the Board for a new task force designation to extend beyond the 2-year period. Any budget items for support of a task force must be approved by the Board and must be for a specified purpose. A Board member is appointed by the president to serve as the liaison to the task force.

Goals and Board Reports

Several written communications are required each year from STFM groups. We have found these reports keep groups focused, help with completing new projects, and serve as very useful information to the members of the groups, to the STFM Board, and for prospective members.

Each group, special committee, and task force must have a set of goals developed by the members of the group. These goals should be reviewed annually and tied to the Society's Core Purpose. The goals and related objectives should provide direction for the group and allow the Board to measure the effectiveness of the group. Goals must be submitted to the Board for consideration at the summer Board meeting.

In addition to annual goals, each group is asked to submit a written progress report, through its Board liaison, for each Board meeting. These meetings occur four times a year—(1) in the spring at the Annual Spring Conference, (2) in July/August, (3) in the fall at the AAMC meeting, and (4) at the Predoctoral Education Conference or the Conference on Families and Health in January or February.

The progress reports should contain information about current and projected activities of the group. Any item to be considered for action by the Board should be clearly identified and the specific action requested. Items that need Board approval include goals and objectives, surveys, requests for outside funding, manuscripts developed by the group, sponsored workshops or meetings, curricular items, and formal liaisons with outside organizations.

In addition, each group has the opportunity to share information about its activities through the Society's *Annual Report*. This report may include activities and accomplishments over the past year.

STFM maintains an on-line listing of all members of STFM groups. Access to your group members' contact information, including e-mail addresses, is available through the STFM Online Membership Directory at www.stfm.org/members/search.cfm. STFM staff is also available to assist you with questions regarding this online listing.

In summary, groups are responsible for the following written reports to the Board on an annual basis:

- (1) Group goals (tied to the STFM Core Purpose and submitted for consideration at the summer Board meeting)
- (2) Four written progress reports about current or projected activities (submitted prior to each Board meeting)
- (3) An annual report for inclusion in the *STFM Annual Report* (submitted in January)

Liaisons

Each group or committee has a formal relationship with the STFM Board, either through a Board member appointed by the president to serve as a liaison or through a Board member serving as the chair. The liaison is the source of information on STFM policies and process and should be kept advised of all activities and communications. The liaison presents a summary of the group's activities at all Board meetings and brings to the group any comments or concerns expressed there. The role of the liaison is defined as follows:

- Facilitate communication between the group or committee and the Board
- Report group activities and decisions to the Board
- Present action items to the Board as requested by the group or committee
- Communicate Board decisions or concerns to the group or committee
- Interpret STFM policies to the group or committee
- Attend group meetings as possible

Group liaisons are listed at www.stfm.org/grups.html under each group's listing.

External Liaisons—Groups and Task Forces

From time to time it may be appropriate for groups and task forces to create liaison relationships with other organizations external to STFM. While these relationships are to be encouraged, special provisions need to be undertaken to assure that such relationships operate consistently with the policies of STFM. The STFM Board should determine what constitutes appropriate liaison activities for task forces and groups to engage in and will need to review the establishment of such relationships for approval.

1. Liaison activities must relate to the mission and purpose of the organization and be consistent with existing policies of STFM and the Board and its advisory committees (Legislative Affairs, Research, Education, Membership, Program, and Communications).
2. The appointed Board liaison to groups and task forces is responsible for assuring that any external liaison activities engaged in by groups and task forces are within the above stated mission and purpose of the organization. The Board liaison should be informed of all activities external to the organization and advise groups and task forces as appropriate. All liaison activities should be reported to the Board and submitted as a formal part of the agenda of the next meeting of the Board.
3. Financing of liaison activities will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Special consideration will be given to those liaison activities that respond to specific announced initiatives of STFM. Wherever possible, ongoing commitments of funds for repeated liaisons should be discouraged; rather, requests should be handled on an as-needed basis.

FMDRL

STFM's Family Medicine Digital Resources Library, www.fmdrl.org, has more than 1200 resources available for family medicine educators. FMDRL also provides each STFM Group with a collaborative work area of its own. The Work Area includes a listserve/discussion forum, group resources, and the ability for interactive Web Spaces for collaboration on curricula and other projects. For more information about how groups can use FMDRL for their work, contact Traci Nolte, STFM communications director, at tnolte@stfm.org.

Funding

Typically, funding for STFM group activities is limited. As a result, group members frequently obtain funding or other support from their home institutions.

Some group activities have been funded through the STFM budget, through contracts with the federal government, through foundation grants, or through special budgets. When funding is available, the funds are administered through the STFM office in accordance with policy or the terms of a contract or grant. Limited funds are also available through a task force/group fund, which operates within the following guidelines:

1. To submit a request for Society funds, a task force or group must have on file approved goals and objectives for the current year.
2. Task forces/groups may apply for assistance by submitting a one-page proposal letter and budget to the appropriate Board liaison for initial approval.
3. Requests for support will be reviewed by the Board liaison and forwarded with comments to the Executive Committee for review at the quarterly meeting following the request.
4. The amount requested by a given task force or group may not exceed \$300 per fiscal year.

Group Project Fund

The STFM Group Project Fund, supported by the STFM Foundation, was established to promote and support innovative educational projects proposed by STFM groups. This fund encourages STFM Group members to collaboratively plan, develop, implement, evaluate, and disseminate findings from educationally related scholarly projects that benefit group members, STFM, and the discipline of family medicine. Foundation Trustees will set aside 50% of the undesignated net proceeds of each annual giving campaign to fund these projects. Request for proposals will be sent annually via e-mail to STFM Group Chairs in October. For more information about the STFM Group Project Fund or to donate to the STFM Foundation to help support projects like those listed here, visit www.stfm.org/foundation.

Meetings

Meetings of STFM committees, task forces, and groups are generally scheduled in conjunction with other STFM meetings, unless there is funding available for separate meetings.

The best opportunity for these meetings is the STFM Annual Spring Conference, where time is set aside for special meetings. In advance of the Annual Spring Conference, each chair is advised of the availability of time and space for a meeting. The meetings are listed in the annual meeting program or the addendum distributed at the meeting. The group may also wish to meet at regional meetings, in which case the chair is responsible for arranging and publicizing the meeting.

To sponsor an independent, freestanding workshop, seminar, or educational meeting, the chair should first contact the appropriate Board liaison and the STFM executive director. They can give advice and guidance on the feasibility of a meeting, availability of staff support, fiscal arrangements, and promotion and administration. A few groups have sponsored meetings in the past, with mixed success. While this is an appropriate activity for a group, it should be explored in considerable detail before moving ahead. Final approval for such a meeting rests with the Board of Directors.

Communications

Some Groups develop newsletters to enhance regular communication with their members. These should focus on news of interest to the members. Care should be taken to avoid the use of copyrighted material. The STFM Board of Directors should be included on all newsletter mailing lists.

Many Groups communicate through their listservs. A listing of all group members and their emails is also available online in the STFM Membership Directory by going to <http://www.stfm.org/members/search.cfm>. You will need to log-in and then you can choose "Find Members of an STFM Group."

Group chairs will receive the *Board Briefing*--a monthly electronic communication that gives you quick and easy-to-follow information on Board members and Society activities. At the Annual Spring Conference, a meeting is held for group and committee chairs to share information, ask questions, network, and learn about STFM initiatives.

Monograph Submission Information

Due to the interest in the development of monographs by STFM groups and committees, STFM has established a set of guidelines to allow us to handle these requests fairly and to communicate to editors, in advance, STFM's requirements for taking on a project of this magnitude. These guidelines are intended to help both authors and STFM staff work together to produce a quality product. For more information about monograph production, contact Traci Nolte at tnolte@stfm.org.

Policies for Submission of Group-created Manuscripts

1. This policy applies to STFM groups, committees, and task forces wishing to have manuscripts published in *Family Medicine* as official reports of the group, committee, or task force. The types of documents to which this policy applies include, but are not limited to:
 - A. Consensus reports
 - B. Practice or curricular guidelines
 - C. Recommend core curricula
 - D. Position statements
 - E. Recommendations for research or other programmatic priorities

2. Manuscript Submission
 - A. Manuscripts should conform and be submitted according to procedures outlined in the journal's instructions for authors, which are published on the STFM Web site at <http://www.stfm.org/publications/familymedicine/author.cfm>.
 - B. The manuscript should include a list of all members of the group, committee, or task force that participated in developing and writing the manuscript.
 - C. The manuscript should be accompanied by a cover letter, signed by the chair and cochair(s) of the group, committee, or task force. The cover letter should
 1. Include all the required statements outlined in the instructions for authors,
 2. State that the manuscript is being submitted as an official report of the group, committee, or task force,
 3. State that the content of the report has been approved by, and represents the official viewpoint of, the group, committee, or task force. In the event that approval of the manuscript as an official report was not unanimous, the cover letter should identify the number and percentage of members that did and did not approve.

3. Manuscript Review Process
 - A. Manuscript will be sent for independent peer review, using the journal's routine review process.
 - B. After considering comments from the reviewers, the editor(s) will make a determination about whether the manuscript should be accepted, rejected, or returned to the authors for revision, resubmission, and reconsideration.
 1. Manuscripts deemed unsuitable for publication will be returned to the author, and no further action will be taken on the manuscript.
 2. Manuscripts deemed suitable for publication will be handled as described below.

4. STFM Board of Directors Review Process
 - A. Manuscripts deemed suitable for publication (before or after revision) by the editor(s) will be forwarded to the STFM Board of Directors for review and approval as a document from the group/committee/task force.

Policy for the Use of STFM's Name on Printed or Electronic Material

Requests from STFM groups, task forces, or committees asking to use STFM's name and/or logo on printed or electronic material will be forwarded to the Communications Committee for review and final approval. The written request should include a copy of the document or the uniform resource locator (URL) of the Web site.

If approved, the group using the STFM name must agree to use the following disclaimer on its index page of the Web site or on the printed material:

For Web Sites:

"This site was created by the (STFM GROUP/COMMITTEE). The site was reviewed on (DATE) by the STFM Communications Committee but has not been reviewed or endorsed by the STFM Board of Directors."

For Printed Documents:

"This document was created by the (STFM GROUP/COMMITTEE). It was reviewed by the STFM Communications Committee but has not been reviewed or endorsed by the STFM Board of Directors."

Listserves

STFM can now provide listserv functionality to STFM Groups through STFM's Family Medicine Digital Resources Library. Each group has a collaborative work area on FMDRL that includes a listserv, a Web space, and a listing of group resources. Individual groups that have questions about the listserv functionality should contact Traci Nolte, STFM communications director, at tnolte@stfm.org.

Link Requests

Groups or individuals may submit requests for links to the STFM Web site. All such requests should be sent to the STFM Communications Director at tnolte@stfm.org. The request will then be sent to the Communications Committee for review. The Committee uses the following criteria when evaluating each link request:

- A. Cosponsorship with other organization
- B. Information of value to members that STFM does not currently provide
- C. Need for STFM members to have easy access to linked information
- D. Activity/information designated by the STFM Board of Directors to be of particular importance to the membership

Surveys

Frequently groups wish to send out a survey or questionnaire to the general STFM membership relative to their areas of interest or activities. The Board of Directors has developed the following guidelines for surveys and questionnaires to audiences external to the group's membership to ensure quality. Generally, surveys are mailed from the STFM headquarters, although some surveys have been mailed from departments or programs where funding was available. The executive director can coordinate distribution details with you. STFM can provide sponsorship or endorsement to surveys. An STFM-sponsored survey is defined as one that is paid for or conducted by STFM staff or Board, or by one of the STFM groups, task forces, or committees. An STFM-endorsed survey is defined as one that receives public approval from STFM.

Three types of STFM surveys are recognized: (1) those generated internally and intended for administrative use only; (2) those generated by STFM members and intended for external dissemination; and (3) those generated by entities outside STFM who need endorsement by STFM.

1. As per Board policy, all STFM surveys require STFM approval prior to being administered. Surveys conducted for internal administrative purposes only (type 1) require approval from the executive director, but not the entire STFM Board.

2. For survey types 2 and 3, one person must be designated as the Board liaison between the survey authors and the Board. This person is responsible for initiating the survey review and communicating between the Board and survey authors.
3. Survey proposals should include a draft of the survey plus a brief description of the project, including rationale, purpose, methods, analysis, and timeline. In addition, authors must include a statement regarding access to and dissemination of information gathered from the survey.

Surveys generated by entities outside STFM (type 3) require prereview for appropriateness from the Executive Committee prior to full Board review.

Surveys intended for external dissemination (types 2 and 3) require prereview for methodological quality by the STFM Research Committee prior to full Board review.

Type 2 and 3 surveys that meet prereview approval will be presented to the full STFM Board for approval.

Prior to administration, the survey should have IRB approval from the parent institution of the survey authors.

4. Dissemination of information from STFM surveys must be agreed on by STFM and the survey authors. The survey authors should submit the results of the survey in writing to the STFM Board within 6 months after data collection is completed.
5. All requests for access to information from an STFM survey must conform to the distribution/dissemination policy approved for that particular survey. These requests must have approval from both the STFM Executive Committee and the survey authors. Exceptions and appeals must go through the STFM Board.
6. Respondents to the survey should be informed about the distribution or dissemination policy for that survey.

Questions to Ask When Considering a Survey of STFM Membership

I. What are your goals for the survey?

- To identify members for networking on similar interests?
- To assess members' needs in a specific area for program development?
- To research a particular question or test a hypothesis?
- To gather information from other programs or individuals?

II. Is a survey the most appropriate method to obtain the information?

Have you checked out other sources of the information that could efficiently and effectively meet your goals, such as:

- STFM computerized membership data or data gathered by other/previous STFM task forces or groups?
- AAFP or ABFM information on the discipline?
- Literature review?
- Expert opinion/advice based on well-justified assumptions regarding members' needs?
- A structured telephone interview of select individuals?
- Letter to the editor of *Family Medicine* asking that interested individuals contact you?
- Breakfast meetings at STFM meetings?

III. *If a survey is the best strategy to meet your goals, please consider the following points:*

A. Intended Audience

- What constituencies of the STFM membership do you need to survey? Why?
- What is the nature of information requested? If confidential, how will you maintain appropriate protection of information? How will you explain confidentiality to the members being surveyed?
- How do you plan to present accumulated information to surveyed members?
- Do you need to survey the entire membership or a random sample?

B. Technical Assistance in Survey Design

- Have you requested technical assistance from local resources for the design of the survey and the analysis of the gathered data? This is especially important if this is a research project to be published.
- If no local resources are available, contact the Research Committee chair for assistance.

C. Fiscal Implications

- What is the projected budget for your survey, including survey duplication, postage for initial and possible second mailings, follow-up mailings, and data processing?
- Outline the fiscal implications during the planning stage and discuss with your Board liaison the potential for STFM support.

D. Pilot Test the Survey on a Sample Respondent