

Resolution No. [Resolution Number] [Type]  
Report: [Report] Date Submitted: [Date Submitted]  
Submitted By: Dr. Spencer Bloom, Delegate, Illinois  
Reference Committee: [Reference Committee for Worksheet]  
Total Net Financial Implication: [Total Net Financial Impl.] Net Dues Impact:   
Amount One-time: Amount On-going:   
ADA Strategic Forecast Outcome: Tripartite: Promote Tripartite stability, success, and future growth.

1 **[GROWING ADA MEMBERSHIP THROUGH TRANSPARENT AND ACCESSIBLE GOVERNANCE]**

2 **Background:**

3 **Rebuilding trust, transparency, and open leadership is essential to the future growth and**  
4 **influence of the American Dental Association.** Membership in the ADA has declined to  
5 approximately **50% of licensed dentists** in the United States. Reversing this trend and restoring  
6 confidence requires modernizing the Association’s approach to governance and participation.

7 Multiple studies have shown that transparency is a key driver of trust, engagement, and  
8 participation within organizations. A Harvard Business Review survey found that **70% of**  
9 **employees are most engaged when leadership communicates transparently about**  
10 **organizational direction** (1). Deloitte reported that **only 13% of organizations are considered**  
11 **leading in transparency and trust-building**, warning that lack of openness harms retention (2).  
12 Additional peer-reviewed research confirms that **transparent communication and leadership**  
13 **directly impact participation and trust** (3).

14 While transparency fosters engagement, barriers to participation—especially long, sequential  
15 leadership tracks—have the opposite effect. According to the Council on Membership’s findings  
16 in the *2024 Annual Reports of the American Dental Association* (pp. 225–231), **early-career**  
17 **dentists ranked volunteer and leadership opportunities among their top priorities**, yet many  
18 reported stronger engagement with local societies than with the ADA nationally (4).

19 Although the ADA itself does not mandate a ladder system, many **state and local dental**  
20 **societies require sequential officer tracks** such as secretary, treasurer, and vice president  
21 before allowing members to be nominated for national leadership. These multi-year pipelines  
22 may have once supported leadership development, but today they act as **structural barriers**,  
23 discouraging qualified dentists who cannot commit years in advance and limiting competitive  
24 elections and fresh ideas.

By contrast, national professional organizations such as the **American Medical Association**, **American Bar Association**, and **American Public Health Association** have adopted more accessible and modern approaches, including:

- **Open calls for nominations;**
- **Merit-based and skill-specific appointments;**
- **Time-limited or project-based leadership roles** (e.g., short-term task forces, working groups, or initiative-based appointments).

Transparency issues also extend into ADA governance. Chapter XIV, Section 10 of the *ADA Constitution and Bylaws* identifies four required procedural manuals: the *Governance and Organizational Manual*, the *Manual of the House of Delegates*, the *Standing Rules of Councils and Commissions*, and the *Organization and Rules of the Board of Trustees*. Despite multiple requests, the *Organization and Rules of the Board of Trustees* has not been made available to members. This conflicts with Section 20 of the same chapter, which states these manuals are “maintained as a guide to the operations of the Association” (5).

The *2025 Governance and Organizational Manual of the American Dental Association*, page 1, reinforces this purpose, stating that it is “under the authority of the ADA House of Delegates” (6).

Further, the *2024 Current Policies of the American Dental Association* affirm that “action items and approved minutes of all open meetings of ADA councils, committees and of the Board of Trustees be promptly posted in the Members Only section on ADA.org” (7). Failure to provide foundational governance documents or overuse of executive session contradicts this policy.

The *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure, Second Edition*—which governs ADA parliamentary conduct—restricts executive session to specific circumstances, such as litigation, personnel, and contract matters. Routine use for strategic or financial decisions undermines member trust and accountability (8).

Finally, as an **Illinois nonprofit organization**, the ADA is subject to **anti-SLAPP protections** under *Illinois Public Act 096-0889*. This law safeguards individuals from retaliation not only for participating in official proceedings, but also for **raising public-interest concerns** about nonprofit governance. Illinois courts have further recognized that **even the threat of a lawsuit may be considered a SLAPP**, if it appears designed to silence legitimate participation (9). Illinois’ anti-SLAPP law is among the strongest in the country, offering early dismissal of meritless claims and recovery of attorney’s fees (10).

These reforms signal to prospective and current members—especially early-career dentists—that the ADA is committed to openness, responsiveness, and member-driven leadership. That message is essential if the ADA is to regain lost members and remain a national voice for dentistry. These changes require minimal financial investment. They rely on existing ADA structures and governance tools, making them practical and cost-effective to implement.

**Resolved**, that in order to strengthen trust and membership growth, the American Dental Association support the adoption of accessible leadership models at all levels of the tripartite structure, allowing all member dentists to contribute based on skill, readiness, and interest—rather than time served—so that new voices and diverse perspectives can shape the future of organized dentistry; and be it further

**Resolved**, that the American Dental Association direct the Council on Membership to pilot at least one modern leadership pathway at the national level—such as open calls for nominations, merit-based appointments, or project-based leadership roles (e.g., short-term task forces, working groups, or initiative-based appointments)—and share results and implementation tools with constituent and component societies to support broader adoption; and be it further

**Resolved**, that the American Dental Association ensure that all governance manuals listed in Chapter XIV, Section 10 of the *ADA Constitution and Bylaws*—including the *Organization and Rules of the Board of Trustees*—are made available to any member in good standing upon request, unless explicitly classified as confidential by a formal resolution of the House of Delegates; and be it further

**Resolved**, that the American Dental Association limit the use of executive session by the Board of Trustees and all ADA governing bodies to matters that clearly require confidentiality under the *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure, Second Edition*, and require that all decisions made in executive session—especially those involving finances or strategic direction—be summarized and reported to the House of Delegates or shared with the membership when not legally restricted; and be it further

**Resolved**, that the American Dental Association report annually to the House of Delegates on progress made toward implementing modern leadership pathways and improving transparency in governance.

## References

1. “How a Lack of Transparency Can Cost Your Organization,” Harvard Business Review, via CoAmplifi (2023)
2. “Transparency in the Workplace,” Deloitte 2024 Global Human Capital Trends
3. “The Role of Transparent Communication and Leadership in Employee Engagement,” ResearchGate.net (2022)
4. *2024 Annual Reports of the American Dental Association*, Council on Membership, pp. 225–231
5. *ADA Constitution and Bylaws*, Chapter XIV, Sections 10 and 20
6. *2025 Governance and Organizational Manual of the American Dental Association*, page 1
7. *2024 Current Policies of the American Dental Association*, policy on posting open meeting actions

- 1        8. *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure,*
- 2        *Second Edition*, executive session guidelines
- 3        9. *Illinois Public Act 096-0889*, Illinois Citizen Participation Act
- 4        10. “Illinois Anti-SLAPP Law,” Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press; and “Anti-
- 5        SLAPP Report Card,” Institute for Free Speech

6