

Resolution No. 213 New

Report: N/A Date Submitted: [Date Submitted]

Submitted By: Dr. Spencer Bloom, delegate, Illinois

Reference Committee: A (Business, Membership and Administrative Matters)

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: Rebuilding trust, transparency, and open leadership is essential to the future growth**  
3 **and influence of the American Dental Association.**

4 In its October 19, 2024 report to the House of Delegates, the then executive director stated, “Our  
5 membership market share as of August was 52.8 percent – down 2.4 percent from the same time last  
6 year,” and warned that “if our ongoing market share decline continues, the ADA faces a tremendous risk  
7 to its influence, relevance, and credibility.” While leadership has since changed, this official report  
8 reflected a continuing downward trend in membership (ADA Executive Director’s Report to the House of  
9 Delegates, Oct. 19, 2024, p. 1–2). (1)

10 Multiple studies have shown that transparency is a key driver of trust, engagement, and participation  
11 within organizations.. Deloitte reported that **only 13% of organizations are considered leading in**  
12 **transparency and trust-building**, warning that lack of openness harms retention. Additional peer-  
13 reviewed research confirms that **transparent communication and leadership directly impact**  
14 **participation and trust** (2) (3).

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

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

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

- 28 • **Open calls for nominations;**
- 29 • **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. (5)

The *2025 Governance and Organizational Manual of the American Dental Association*, page 1, reinforces this purpose, stating “This Governance and Organizational Manual of the American Dental Association (the “Governance Manual”) contains the general governance, organizational policies and processes of the American Dental Association and is under the authority of the ADA House of Delegates.”(6).

This resolution does not override the Board’s authority to create its own rules. It simply ensures that all governance manuals listed in Chapter XIV, Section 10—including the Board’s—are accessible to members, as required by Section 20. Making these documents available upon request aligns with ADA policy on transparency and member access.

The *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure, Second Edition*—which governs ADA parliamentary conduct—restricts executive session to specific circumstances as outlined in 18.21 and 18.24.. (7) These proposed reforms can 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.

## Resolution

**Resolved**, that in order to strengthen trust and membership growth, the American Dental Association promote the adoption of accessible leadership models across the tripartite structure by developing and sharing voluntary model policies and best practices that allow member dentists to serve 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 appropriate ADA agencies recommend to the Board of Trustees a pilot to address 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 **make 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*—**available to any member** in good standing upon request, unless the House of Delegates has explicitly classified the document as confidential by formal resolution 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—**when not legally or ethically**

**restricted**—be summarized and reported to the House of Delegates or shared with the membership, 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.

### References

1. [Report of the ADA Executive Director](#)
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, p.80](#)
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. *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure, Second Edition*, executive session guidelines