

Resolution 213 — Growing ADA Membership Through Transparent and Accessible Governance

Author: Dr. Spencer Bloom, Delegate

IF YOU VOTE YES

A YES vote supports the action requested in the resolving clauses. This resolution calls for the ADA to develop and share voluntary model policies that open leadership to more members based on skill, readiness, and interest, not seniority. It asks for a national pilot to test new leadership pathways such as open nominations, merit-based appointments, and short-term project roles. It also urges limits on closed sessions and requires an annual report to the House on progress toward modern, transparent governance.

IF YOU VOTE NO

A NO vote accepts the status quo and supports the Board's view that current internal programs are sufficient. It keeps leadership tracks slow and inaccessible for many qualified dentists and continues allowing governance sessions to remain closed to members. This position risks further disconnecting the ADA from its membership base and reinforces barriers that discourage new leaders.

SUMMARY

This resolution aims to grow ADA membership by strengthening trust and transparency in leadership. It seeks to modernize outdated officer ladders that block participation and to make leadership more accessible to early-career and busy dentists. By supporting voluntary model policies, pilot projects, and annual reporting, the ADA can demonstrate that it values inclusivity, accountability, and member-driven leadership—key factors in reversing declining membership.

Why the Board Is Wrong

The Board voted NO, claiming similar work is already being done by the Council on Membership and other programs. However, those efforts are limited in scope and lack House oversight. This resolution gives the House a role in shaping leadership reform and ensures accountability through annual reports. By rejecting this resolution, the Board preserves an opaque system that deters participation and erodes member trust. True transparency means sharing all governance manuals, reducing closed sessions, and opening leadership to all qualified members—not just those who can wait years in officer pipelines.

TALKING POINTS

- ADA membership has dropped below 53 percent, signaling a crisis of confidence.
- Outdated leadership ladders discourage younger members from serving.
- Open nominations and project-based leadership attract new voices.
- Transparency in governance builds trust and engagement.
- Annual progress reports keep the House and members informed.
- This resolution costs nothing and strengthens member connection to the ADA's mission.
- Saying YES supports accessible leadership, trust, and growth.
- Saying NO supports barriers, opacity, and continued decline.



Prepared by Dentistry in General Advocacy Coalition
<https://dentistryingeneral.com/digac>

Resolution No. 213 New

Report: N/A Date Submitted: 06/18/2025

Submitted By: Dr. Spencer Bloom, delegate, Illinois

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

Total Net Financial Implication: None 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 The following resolution was submitted on Wednesday, June 18, 2025, by Dr. Spencer Bloom, delegate,
3 Illinois.

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

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

12 While transparency fosters engagement, barriers to participation—especially long, sequential leadership
13 tracks—have the opposite effect. According to the Council on Membership’s findings in the *2024 Annual*
14 *Reports of the American Dental Association* (pp. 225–231), early-career dentists ranked volunteer and
15 leadership opportunities among their top priorities, yet many reported stronger engagement with local
16 societies than with the ADA nationally. (2)

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

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

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

29 Transparency issues also extend into ADA governance. Chapter XIV, Section 10 of the *ADA Bylaws*
30 identifies four required procedural manuals: the *Governance and Organizational Manual*, the *Manual of*
31 *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. (3)

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.”(4).

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. (5)

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.

References

1. [Report of the ADA Executive Director](#)
2. [2024 Annual Reports of the American Dental Association, Council on Membership, p.80](#)
3. [ADA Constitution and Bylaws, Chapter XIV, Sections 10 and 20](#)
4. [2025 Governance and Organizational Manual of the American Dental Association, page 1](#)
5. *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure, 2nd Edition*, executive session guidelines

Resolution

213. Resolved, that the American Dental Association support 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, 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 Board of Trustees and all governing bodies be urged to limit the use of closed sessions to matters that clearly require confidentiality under the *American Institute of Parliamentarians Code of Parliamentary Procedure, Second Edition*, 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.

BOARD COMMENT: While the Board ultimately voted not to support the resolution as submitted, we want to emphasize that this vote in no way reflects a desire to block access to leadership opportunities within the ADA. The Board remains fully committed to fostering merit-based pathways for leadership development across the Tripartite. There are already ongoing efforts that include The Council on Membership’s work to implement modern leadership pathways that actively engage early-career dentists and programs and initiatives designed to promote participation in ADA governance and leadership roles at all levels. The Board encourages the House of Delegates to recognize these already ongoing efforts, including constituent led leadership development programs, and affirms that ADA leadership opportunities remain open and accessible to all eligible members.

1 BOARD RECOMMENDATION: Vote No**2 Vote: Resolution 213**

BERG	No	DOWD	No	KNAPP	No	STUEFEN	No
BOYLE	No	GRAHAM	No	MANN	No	TULAK-GORECKI	No
BROWN	No	HISEL	Absent	MARKARIAN	No	WANAMAKER	No
CAMMARATA	No	HOWARD	No	MERCER	No		
CHOPRA	No	IRANI	No	REAVIS	No		
DEL VALLE-SEPÚLVEDA	No	KAHL	No	ROSATO	No		