



Request for Proposal

Creating Neuroinclusive Environments in Associations

ASAE Research Foundation is inviting qualified and experienced organizations, consultants, and academic institutions to submit a proposal for research to investigate neuroinclusive environments in association management. Respondents should send their proposals to research@asaecenter.org. Proposals should not exceed six pages in length and must be received by **Friday, December 20, 2024, at 11:59 PM ET**.

Project Background

In a continued effort to examine diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in trade and professional associations, this research is intended to address neurodiversity inclusion in association management; identify leading practices for building consciously inclusive environments for neurodivergent volunteer leaders, members, and staff; and identify the opportunities and insights afforded by this diversity.

Per the Oxford Languages Dictionary, neurodiversity is the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population (used especially in the context of autistic spectrum disorders).¹ Based on a variety of studies, nearly one in five of the U.S. population is neurodiverse. Society is increasingly acknowledging the importance of embracing neurodiversity, recognizing the unique strengths and challenges it presents. In association management, ensuring inclusivity for neurodivergent individuals, beyond what is defined and required by the ADA, is paramount for fostering a diverse and welcoming environment. Despite growing awareness, there remains limited research on neurodiversity within the association context.

The outcomes of the research should provide data and insights:

- To guide associations in the creation of a neuroinclusive culture among association staff, members, volunteers, and vendors that moves beyond compliance and values and embraces those with neurodiversity and creates a sense of belonging.
- To enable associations to identify and minimize barriers that prevent a neuroinclusive environment.

Research Questions

Examples of research questions include (but are not limited to):

- What is the definition of a “Neuroinclusive Association Environment” and what does it look like?
- What gaps exist in creating an inclusive association culture for neurodivergent individuals?
- What barriers do organizations face when trying to build an inclusive culture, and embrace neurodivergent individuals (e.g., financial resources, staff knowledge/expertise, etc.)?
- What is required to ensure that neurodivergent individuals can bring their authentic self to the association, feel a sense of belonging, and contribute to their fullest potential?
- What metrics can be used to determine success?

¹ Oxford Languages. (n.d.). Neurodiversity. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/neurodiversity>.

Scope of Work

The research on neuroinclusive environments must address the major thematic areas of stakeholder engagement and organizational effectiveness. The research will be divided into the following parts:

Part 1: Stakeholder Engagement

1. Meetings and Learning: How are associations designing and delivering programs, meetings, and learning events that are inclusive of neurodiverse individuals?

Please note: This focus area should be a deeper dive into the research, analysis, and key findings regarding how associations are designing and delivering programs, meetings, and learning events that are inclusive of neurodiverse individuals.

2. Other Business Development: How are associations designing and delivering products and services that are inclusive of neurodiverse individuals?
3. Member and Stakeholder Engagement and Management: How are associations engaging neurodiverse members and stakeholders to ensure their skills and talents are fully leveraged?
4. Marketing and Communications: How are associations communicating their commitment to neurodiversity and ensuring their marketing materials are inclusive?

Part 2: Organizational Effectiveness

1. Governance: How are associations providing supportive environments for volunteer leaders and members with neurodiversity within their governance structures?
2. Executive Leadership: How are associations ensuring that executive leadership is inclusive and supportive of staff and volunteers with neurodiversity?
3. Organizational Strategy: How are associations incorporating neurodiversity into their strategic planning and organizational goals?
4. Operations: What operational practices are associations implementing to support staff and volunteers with neurodiversity?

Methodology

This request for proposals is not restricted to any particular methodology. However, researchers are requested to employ a mixed-method approach that includes members of associations as research participants to provide a well-rounded understanding of the research topic.

Deliverables

The selected research team must complete the work described and outlined in the proposal/scope of work within the study timeframe. The deliverables should come in four sections:

- An overall, comprehensive report
- A report on the Stakeholder Engagement section
- A report on the deep dive of meetings and learnings
- A report on the Organizational Effectiveness section

Each report should include:

- An introduction to the topic and a brief literature review, if applicable
- Summary and analysis of the research findings
- Implications for associations
- Recommendations for association leaders

The required deliverables will serve as the basis for new research-based content from ASAE and the ASAE Research Foundation. Additional deliverables, such as educational sessions, models, organizational assessment tools, and publications, may be added based on needs.

Timeline

Research on the two parts may be conducted concurrently; however, deliverables should adhere to the following timeline, with Part 1 being delivered first, followed by Part 2. An overview of the complete research report should be delivered last.

- April 2025, Stakeholder Engagement findings report.
- June 2025, Organizational Effectiveness findings report.
- July 2025, Project overview report

Eligibility

Eligible applicants will show demonstrated expertise in research collection and analysis in the association arena. Additionally, **ASAE is particularly interested in research teams who have conducted research in topics related to diversity, equity and inclusion, specifically with a solid background in neurodiversity rights and neurodiversity connections.**

Submission Guidelines

Applicants must provide a description of the proposed program of research that incorporates the desired elements detailed above. The proposal must not exceed 6 pages and must include specific aims, research design, projected timelines, and expected outcomes and deliverables. In addition to the proposal requirements, the applicant must also include the following documents:

- Project Title
- Project Abstract (not to exceed one page)
- References
- Biographical Sketch (not to exceed one page) of all project personnel (must show demonstrated research expertise)
- Budget (with accompanying justification that is consistent with the scope of work)

These documents are not included in the proposed program of research's 6-page maximum requirement.

The proposal must be submitted electronically to:

Andrea Wieters,
Director, Strategic and Future-Focused Research
ASAE Research Foundation
research@asaecenter.org

The completed application **must be submitted on or before 11:59 PM ET, December 20, 2024**, and will be reviewed according to the conceptual framework, general approach to addressing the research questions, and

methodology and data collection procedures. *(Note: For research teams whose institution requires an approved IRB, note that you may apply while waiting for IRB approval.)*

Review and Selection Process

The selection and notification process will be completed in January 2025, with the award period commencing immediately thereafter. Proposals will undergo a review of a panel of volunteers evaluating for research design and approach, and applicant qualifications and experience. A video conference may be requested for additional information.

If you have questions about the RFP, please email Andrea Wieters (research@asaecenter.org).

ASAE Research Foundation transforms the association community through research, scholarships, and practical tools critical to our profession. The foundation has a balanced and multi-dimensional portfolio of research initiatives that are designed to 1) advance a body of knowledge, 2) define and inform effective practices, and 3) provide outcomes that lead to data-driven decisions. Visit: <https://foundation.asaecenter.org/>.

ASAE values and supports inclusion, diversity, and equity. We do not discriminate against individuals based on race, color, religion, national origin, age, marital status, personal appearance, sexual orientation, gender identity, family responsibility, political affiliation, or disability, or any other protected characteristic. We expect that the successful respondent will support ASAE's values and adhere to standards of research integrity and ethical practices in conducting research consistent with those of the ASAE Research Foundation.