

# A WORD FROM...

Boris Hasselblatt, Secretary of the AMS



*The opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the Notices or the AMS.*



Photo by Alonso Nichols/Tufts University

In these *Notices*, readers are informed annually about AMS elections. You are invited to become involved by voting or by suggesting a colleague or yourself for an appointment or a nomination. Suggestions will be received gratefully and considered seriously, especially if they come with helpful thoughts about which position might be a good match and why. Serving our community through involvement in the largest mathematics society can be greatly rewarding.

It may be helpful to know more about how election slates and appointments come about, and this is an attempt to lay out how this process and the one for committee appointments combine deliberation and consultation with openness. These processes are evolving, particularly since the Society received the report from our Task Force on Understanding and Documenting the Historical Role of the AMS in Racial Discrimination. It strengthened our commitment to increasing inclusivity in all we do and has already made a difference with respect to elections.

Elections make the members of the AMS the ultimate power in the Society. At times they amend the bylaws of the Society, and they put in place the President of the AMS and members of our main governance bodies (the Council and the Board of Trustees). The Council has authority over scientific and policy matters and acts in an advisory capacity to the Board of Trustees which has fiduciary responsibility for the public trust in the Society, notably including finances and risks. Our Executive Director reports to the Board of Trustees and leads a staff of some 200 in implementing AMS programs and policies. The Officers of the Society are variously elected and appointed. The President (and President-Elect and Immediate Past President) and the three Vice Presidents are elected, while the other officers are appointed by the Council: the Treasurer and Associate Treasurer, and the Secretariat, which includes the Secretary and one Associate Secretary for each of our four geographical sections.

The election slates are brought to the members variously by the Council and the President in ways described below, and members are encouraged to provide input for the deliberations that occur along the way.

The Nominating Committee of the Council is elected, and each year the President names at least six candidates for three elected positions on the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee recommends to the Council slates for election to the Council, the Board of Trustees, for President, and for the Vice Presidents, consisting of two nominees for each position. The Nominating Committee is instructed to keep diversity of all kinds in mind when selecting candidates.

AMS members can directly participate in this process in several ways. First, the bylaws stipulate that the slates proposed by the Council shall contain blank spaces in which a voter may substitute other names, so a write-in campaign could lead to the election of a candidate not nominated by the Council.

However, members can influence the creation of the slates as well. On one hand, members can directly propose to the Council nominees for the positions of Vice President, Members at Large of the Council, Members of the Nominating Committee, and Members of the Editorial Boards Committee. This is done by petition in a process which is regularly described in the *Notices*, and which bypasses the Nominating Committee and the President.

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*Boris Hasselblatt is Secretary of the AMS. His email address is [ams\\_secretary@ams.org](mailto:ams_secretary@ams.org).*

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The Council of 23 January 1979 stated the intent of the Council to nominate all persons on whose behalf there were valid petitions. It has since only once failed to do so.

Members can also provide input to the Nominating Committee in the creation of the slates. Indeed, for both elections and appointments, members can volunteer themselves or others at the nomination link in the sidebar. This is most helpful if accompanied by

thoughts about why that person would serve well in the proposed (or in any) capacity. These suggestions come directly before the respective advisory committees for consideration. In particular, if you want (yourself or someone you know) to be nominated for an elected position, this is a good way to make your case to the Nominating Committee or the President. Any member in good standing of the Society is eligible for candidacy and election to office or for membership on committees of the Society.

We are often not aware of qualities that we could bring to a new role, even when others are. So it may also be well to think about colleagues who you believe to be well-suited to contributing to the profession. Encourage them to think about that, or directly nominate them for appointment or election.

That the President nominates candidates for the Nominating Committee, which in turn nominates candidates for the presidency may seem like a closed loop. But on one hand, nominations for the Nominating Committee can come by petition, and on the other hand, this is an open loop in that the actions of the members of the Nominating Committee appointed by a given President do not affect committee staffing during that President's term, while members of the Nominating Committee rotate off before a President they nominated takes office. The specific timeline is as follows. Every even year the Nominating Committee recommends to the Council two nominees for election to the position of President Elect as well as a Nominator for each candidate. For example, the 2020 Nominating Committee recommended (and Council approved) a slate that included Bryna Kra, who was then elected President in the Fall of 2021 and became President-Elect on February 1, 2022. Kra will become President on February 1, 2023, the last year in which any members of the 2020 Nominating Committee or members at large of the 2020 Council serve. In the course of her 2-year term, Kra will nominate candidates for six of nine positions on the Nominating Committee, whose terms will start on January 1, 2024 and 2025, respectively. The nominations they in turn recommend to the Council will then be for terms that begin after Kra's term as President ends. (The President is not eligible for immediate reelection.)

Thus, a President's priorities in selecting candidates for the Nominating Committee reflect a sense of what will serve the Society best in the coming years. While this may drive the specific considerations in ways that differ between presidents, they seek to ensure that committee members understand how AMS governance works, and that among them, members of the Nominating Committee have the broadest possible professional network. This is most likely the case if the Nominating Committee itself is diverse in every respect, and its members are familiar with AMS governance. Being willing and able to perform a lot of work in a short period (around the Joint Mathematics Meetings) and being able to persuade potential nominees to agree to stand for election are essential as well. It is engaging work, and if you would like to be nominated for the Nominating Committee, please either use the "Nominate" link in the sidebar or send an email to the President early in the calendar year to express your interest and convey what qualities you would bring to the committee. You can also persuade and then suggest a colleague.

Presidents influence the course of thought and action in the Society not only in planning the meetings at which they preside but also through appointments of committee members and representatives made after consultation with the Committee on Committees and others. The Committee on Committees consists of the President and Secretary (ex officio), the President Elect (when there is one) and six other members, of whom one is an additional member of the Executive Committee of the Council and at least one more is a member at large of the Council. The other three are appointed at the

[Link to nomination by petition \(in Notices\): https://www.ams.org/journals/notices/202208/rnoti-p1424.pdf](https://www.ams.org/journals/notices/202208/rnoti-p1424.pdf)

[Nomination links: https://www.ams.org/committee-nominate](https://www.ams.org/committee-nominate)

[Alphabetical listing of committees: https://www.ams.org/about-us/governance/committees/comm-all.html](https://www.ams.org/about-us/governance/committees/comm-all.html)

[Thematic committee list: https://www.ams.org/about-us/governance/committees/gov-committees](https://www.ams.org/about-us/governance/committees/gov-committees)

[For suggestions for bio prompts etc. for candidates as well as any other inquiries, please email secretary@ams.org](mailto:secretary@ams.org)

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will of the President and need not be Council members. This committee does its work in some eight hours of meetings in May (plus work leading up to those meetings), and the result consists of recommendations to the President for the many appointments that need to be made for imminent vacancies. For this enormous task, (self-) nominations greatly help the committee and the President!

Through its prompts to candidates as they prepare their biographical information, the Society aims to provide members with helpful information about the candidates. As one result of the Task Force report, these prompts have been evolving, and will continue to do so. If you think of information you would like to know about candidates but do not see in the election materials, please suggest additional information that might be included in the future. But foremost, do vote. Your vote matters, and more so than you might think: the total number of ballots cast is of late only a little over 3000.

For anyone new to AMS governance, committee involvement may be where to engage first. In fact, there are enough committees to make learning about them a research project in itself. Most of them are filled by appointments rather than election, and the alphabetical listing of committees provides the quickest way to appreciate just how many opportunities there are—but it is more useful to consult a thematic list instead. Might you be interested in serving on an editorial board? A prize or fellowship selection committee? A program committee for meetings? A speaker selection committee? A policy committee?

Often the committee name gives a good indication of what a committee deals with. This may help you decide which committee(s) might be a good fit for you. These lists include both elected and appointed committees. Each committee link goes to a list of current (and past) members as well as the group's charge, which provides more insight into what the committee does, and how. Consider asking a friend who has been engaged in AMS governance for some ideas on what committees might interest you. If you happen to know (or are happy to contact) any particular present or former member of a committee, then you have direct access to first-hand insights. Otherwise, do not hesitate to write to discuss committee membership or for more information.

And foremost, vote! It matters.