

TO: Executive Board and International Council
FROM: Tom Jacobson
DATE: May 12, 2025
RE: Policy and Process for Four-Year Renewal of Working Groups

Introduction

Due to recent revisions in IAMCR's Statutes, a passage in Article 9 of the Statutes now holds: "Every 4 years, Working Groups should report to the International Council which will then decide to renew them for a further 4 years or to close them." The Scholarly Review Committee (SRC) was asked to develop a protocol for this process. The International Council approved it June 30, 2024 during its Christchurch meeting. This memorandum outlines the protocol. In three parts it addresses: 1) Aims of the protocol, 2) Criteria for review and renewal, and 3) A Procedure for Review and Renewal.

Aims of the Protocol

- 1) Support and promote Working Groups and their role within the Association. The work of the Association is driven, and sustained, by the interests of Section and Working Group members and their commitments. Supporting these interests and commitments should be a high priority in any review and renewal process. Emphasis is to be placed on protecting these while stimulating innovation. Working Group accomplishments and plans that are reported in renewal applications will be distributed to the International Council and IAMCR Membership with each renewal cycle. This will include an annual story on newly renewed Working Groups to be placed in the IAMCR Newsletter, in an appendix in the Annual Report of Section and Working Group activity, and in other ways.
- 2) Promote thematic innovation in the Association's training, research, and theoretical work: With the rapid pace of global change, it is increasingly important to develop methods for innovative research themes as well as in modalities of research collaboration and interaction among researchers. The efforts of individual researchers and research groups can be assisted by organizational mechanisms that facilitate such innovation. Critical reflection during the renewal process is intended to encourage and renew attention to innovations and new developments.
- 3) Further differentiate Sections and Working Groups: Differences between Sections and Working Groups have become obscured over recent decades in the life of the Association, exemplified by the fact that some Working Groups are larger than some Sections. This is a cause of some confusion, especially among non-members, about how to engage the Association in advancing their research within the Association. It also neglects opportunities to develop organizational methods supporting the Association's efforts to spearhead work in important areas.

In practice Sections appear to be differentiated from Working Groups mainly by levels of required research activity, as reflected in guidelines for establishing and renewing Sections

(<https://iamcr.org/SRC>). But there are other differences as well. In principle, Sections are to be treated as major subdisciplines in the field of media and communication research and be permanent within the Association. According to the Statutes, Working Groups pursue more specialized research programs while pursuing emerging research topics. They are not expected to be permanent within the organization, having a more limited duration, requiring review and renewal every four years.

Working Groups that can demonstrate that their research addresses emerging subdisciplines are encouraged to consider applying for Section status while, conversely, smaller Sections that might welcome less onerous productivity requirements and are tightly focused on agendas of more transitory subjects might consider shifting to Working Group status or combining with other Sections or Working Groups. In general, the Association encourages Sections and Working Groups to think flexibly about ongoing collaborations as well as mergers with other Sections and Working Groups where this could facilitate innovative research agendas as well as administrative efficiencies.

Criteria for Review and Renewal

- 1) Criteria for Working Group renewal are of two kinds. The first kind reflects the productivity guidelines now employed in the annual survey of Sections and Working Groups. See: “Requirements for Working Groups” (<https://iamcr.org/SRC>). These include:
 - a. An elected Head, with all elected officers paying their IAMCR membership fees,
 - b. A mission statement. This should not duplicate the work of other Sections or Working Groups but may note where productive overlap with the work of other Sections and Working Groups could be leveraged to advance mutual research agendas.
 - c. Hold at least 1 panel session each year.
 - d. Employ additional activities to support the work of the members of the Working Group by way of publications or events (with descriptions and full citation information noted).

Panel sessions and additional activities are minimal requirements for each of the 4 years preceding application for renewal.

- 2) The second kind of criteria for renewal reflects the aim of stimulating thematic innovation and differentiating between Sections and Working Groups. These replicate, in part, the criteria now used in applications to establish Working Groups (<https://iamcr.org/SRC>). In addition, they include new criteria requiring additional forward thinking and planning. These include:

- a. A vision statement describing the Working Group's vision for the four years of work to follow.
- b. A three-paragraph statement on the most pressing or emerging intellectual or empirical challenges within the Working Group's thematic research areas. This should include critical reflection on the Working Group's performance in light of its mission and success in achieving its most recently stated plan of work. How well has it embodied the vision under which it was established (or renewed previously). What has it done most effectively and least effectively? What were the reasons for successes and disappointments?
- c. A 4-year plan of work. This plan will include the kinds of activities specified in the list of required Section or Working Group activities, expressed along a rough timeline for the future, e.g., year-one, year-two, year three...

These renewal criteria are to be made explicit and available annually in the form of a Renewal Application Form on the webpage of the Scholarly Review Committee to be employed by Working Group heads.

Procedure for Review and Renewal

The four-year review and renewal of Working Groups is conducted jointly by the Executive Board, Executive Secretariat, and the International Council with support from the Scholarly Review Committee, which then present the individual applications for renewal to the International Council for a vote of approval.

The annual SRC review of Section and Working Group activity will be conducted, and a report prepared, annually as done previously with the exception of the "rolling evaluation," for Working Groups. This rolling evaluation becomes mute given the 4-year renewal process. Instead, the annual data gathered from Working Groups will be archived and used as input to each 4-year renewal application. The SRC will continue to review the annual Working Group data informally on an annual basis and will assist Working Groups as needed.

The simultaneous renewal of 20 Working Groups every fourth year would place an extreme burden on the EB, SRC, and IC during renewal years. To spread this burden across time 25% of the Working Groups will be evaluated in a given year proceeding alphabetically, excluding Working Groups less than 3 years old. The Executive Secretariat will circulate a call for renewal applications annually to the scheduled Working Groups. The applications will be collected by the Executive Secretariat and checked for completeness who will follow-up with Working Groups as needed. Complete applications will be circulated to the President and Scholarly Review Committee. The Scholarly Review Committee will add activity data from the preceding 4 years to these applications and review them to assess whether productivity guidelines have been met. The SRC will then return the applications with the additional data and its reviews to the Executive Secretariat for distribution to the President and Executive Board who will conduct a review of their own. Once done, the

President will schedule the renewal applications for discussion and a vote within the International Council. The International Council will vote to renew each Working Group or to place it on probation.

A Working Group placed on probation will have two years during which it may continue to operate while appealing for renewal and revising its application. (This two-year period repeats the grace period previously employed in guidelines for the annual rolling review.) The Scholarly Review Committee will be available for consultation upon request. A Working Group in probation may decide on its own to end its activities. A notification with this intent can be sent to the Executive Secretary. If deciding to continue, a revised application will be submitted to the Executive Secretariat by March 1 during second following year. It will be reviewed by Scholarly Review Committee and forwarded to the Executive Board with its advice. The Executive Board will formulate a proposal for the International Council and schedule a final vote of the Council.

With a renewal application deadline of March 1, the International Council can review applications and discuss them during its meeting during the following June/July conference. The purpose of face-to-face discussion is to promote within the Association its interest in innovative research and collaboration among Sections and Working Groups. The annual vote could be held either during the International Council meeting at the conference or soon after, sometime in August through October.

Renewal Schedule

The first IAMCR 4-year renewal timeline will begin at the 2024 conference in Christchurch. The first scheduled group of Working Groups will apply for renewal in 2028. Subsequent 4-year Working Group renewals will be conducted annually thereafter.

Anticipating six reviews annually the provisional schedule is as follows, pending possible changes in the number of Working Groups:

2028

- Comic Art - COA
- Communication in Post- and Neo-Authoritarian Societies - CPN
- Communication, Social Justice and Democracy - CSD
- Crisis, Security and Conflict Communication - CRI
- Diaspora and Media - DIM
- Digital Divide – DID

2029

- Environment, Science & Risk Communication - ESR
- Ethics of Society & Ethics of Communication - ETH
- Global Media Policy - GMP
- Health Communication - HEC
- Inclusive Communication and People with Disabilities - PWD
- Islam and Media - ISM

2030

Media Production Analysis - MPA
Media Sector Development - MSD
Multimodal Communication Research - MCR
Music, Audio, Radio and Sound - MAR
Popular Culture - POP
Public Service Media Policies - PSM

2031

Religion and Communication - REC
Rural Communication - RUC
Visual Culture - VIC