

CSPB Diversity and Equity Task Force Report

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Scope of Reference:

The task force has decided to focus on issues present within the CSPB's by-laws, awards, policies, procedures, leadership, and membership composition as a starting point. Our concerns and recommendations therefore most affect current CSPB members and potential future members and not the larger plant biology community in Canada.

Major Society Awards:

All members of the committee expressed concerns regarding the terms of reference of several society awards, the policies outlining eligibility and nominations, and the composition of evaluating committee membership.

Issues Identified:

1. Society awards recognize the traditional notions of excellence, original research, and impact on the field of plant biology. The terms of reference do not effectively recognize different styles of excellence, different career trajectories, and non-traditional measures of excellence.

Proposed Solution:

i) All terms of reference for society awards should be reviewed and revised in order to recognize excellence and impact in the broadest terms possible. Examples could include: teaching, service, mentoring, outreach, media interviews and public communication of science, etc.

ii) New awards could be created to specifically target particular areas of excellence and impact that the society believes to be important (e.g. mentoring award, public awareness award, etc.)

2. Several society awards currently exclude many members of the society who have experienced non-linear career paths and have taken personal leaves due to a variety of life events.

Proposed Solution:

i) All terms of reference for society awards should contain a clause that clearly indicates that eligibility time frames will be extended based on the number of personal/professional leaves taken during the time frame indicated. As an example, the Australian Research Council has several awards that, like the CD Nelson Award, are presented to researchers within X number of years after PhD completion. They have fairly clear and reasonable rules about eligibility exemption that would allow a person to extend the time after their PhD during which they are eligible for these awards, based on: "carer's responsibility; disruption due to international

relocation for post-doctoral studies or other research employment not exceeding three months per international relocation; illness, maternity or parental leave; unemployment; non-research employment not concurrent with research employment; the primary care of a dependent child (inclusive of carer's responsibility and any maternity or partner/parental leave), two years per dependent child." While this list might not entirely suit the criteria for all of our awards, they might not be a bad place to start. One approach could be to change the bylaw to limit nominees to individuals at the rank of Assistant or Associate Professor (or equivalent). While this could be seen as providing no time limit, candidates producing "outstanding research contributions to plant biology," should be pushing for promotion to the rank of Professor within 10-15 years of appointment.

3. Over the history of the society, most of the awards made have been to men. This reflects both demographics of the membership and likely a degree of bias (conscious or unconscious) from a society that has awards going back to 1970 (The Gold Medal) or 1978 (C.D. Nelson Award). Interestingly, there have been no female winners of the David J. Gifford Award in Tree Biology (even under its previous name) which was founded in 1988. Three of 24 Gold Medal winners were women, going back to 1988 when it was awarded to Ann Oaks, and up to 2013 when it was awarded to Bev Green. Similarly, the CD Nelson Award in Plant Biology has been awarded to 3 women, although promisingly, the last two awardees were women. Junior CSPB-SCBV members face many challenges in starting independent research programs. Awards committees and the membership at large would be hard pressed to equalize all aspects of support provided by employers, mentors, and colleagues. It should be noted that of the last 13 C.D. Nelson award winners, all but one is from a research focused university, and only two awardees are not from U15 institutions. This point is not meant to minimize gender, or minority equity, it is to point out another aspect to an un-level playing field. Using academic rank as a metric for assessing eligibility for the CD Nelson Award would help to even things out, the committee would also need to take a greater responsibility, as would nominators.

Proposed solutions:

- i)* Make a conscious effort to nominate more women and individuals from underrepresented groups for various awards and recognitions. Thus, a grass roots level of consideration for colleagues from diverse backgrounds needs to occur. Friends and colleagues are the first step in the process.
- ii)* Educate evaluation committees on conscious and unconscious biases and how they factor into decisions and evaluations of candidates.
- iii)* Regardless of how we move forward, one problem we will face is that as a relatively small society, with a significant amount of interconnectedness, many of the awards become popularity contests. Faculty from larger institutions are more likely to have senior colleagues who are also members of the society, and thus possible nominators. These senior colleagues are also more likely to know the members on the awards committees. From experience in making nominations to society awards, there certainly seem to be links between who is on the award committee in a given year and who is recommended for the award. Needing 3 full members for a nomination can be burdensome for the original nominator, especially if the nomination is for a member from a smaller institution.

4. Concerns were raised about the composition of award committees with respect to diversity. The committee make up for each of the society's named awards include three individuals, who have volunteered or been recruited by the Nominating Committee. Equity within these committees varies greatly.

Proposed Solutions:

i) Remove regional biases within the compositions of each award committee by introducing quotas for committee composition. Currently, there appears to be a distinct eastern Canada bias, with 27 committee members from Ontario or Quebec, 1 from Atlantic Canada, and 5 from western Canada (Manitoba and west). This may limit equity and diversity in conferring awards, due to the familiarity of local nominees to committee members. Making new faculty members feel welcome as CSPB members may help us to recruit more diverse volunteers for these positions.

ii) All award committees should be composed of members that reflect the diversity present in the society at large.

Future Considerations:

1. The above suggestions should be taken into account when setting terms of reference for the award funded by the Carl Douglas Endowment, especially taking the time to define the term post-doc.

Student/Post-Doc Travel Awards

All members of the committee expressed concerns regarding the process of awarding student and post-doctoral travel awards.

Issues Identified:

1. The current process for awarding student and post-doctoral travel awards is not particularly clear. It is based primarily on the applicant's travel distance to the meeting.

Proposed Solutions:

i) A clear rubric or formula should be devised for the awarding of travel awards using a combination of need and travel distance. This may mean that the application form must be revised.

ii) Explore the idea of creating diversity travel awards that students or post-docs specifically can apply to. Several other societies have travel awards that are targeted towards under-represented members.

iii) Two separate pots of money should be set aside for student vs. post-doctoral travel awards funds. As post-docs often have fewer financial supports available to them, we suggest increasing the value of travel awards given to post-docs.

Presentation Awards at Meetings

Several members expressed concerns about the transparency and judging of the oral and poster presentation awards at meetings.

Issues Identified:

1. Current processes appear to occur on an ad-hoc basis and are frustrating for the judges and candidates. Building off comments supplied by Daphne Goring, Eastern Regional Director, Mark Belmonte, Western Regional Director, and Geoff Wasteneys, Vice President, judging is both challenging and has inherent subjectiveness. We often have concurrent sessions, with competing students speaking at the same time. With a limited number of judges available, very little overlap exists between talks in different session, or across days. Daphne noted, and I have also observed this as a judge, judges are able to identify the best talks and posters amongst those they viewed. However, comparing across sessions or between judging groups becomes much more challenging. Some judges have different key points they look for, but are often open to persuasion by others.

Proposed Solutions:

i) A great innovation presented by Geoff Wasteneys at the 2016 Annual Meeting at Queen's University was the use of an online spreadsheet to allow judges to select the talks they would view, and post their rubric-aligned evaluations. This could allow for broader coverage of talks, judges' interests being more aligned with the topics being presented, and allows individual judges and the chief organizer to easily compare judging scores. This system seems like it has great potential to even out biases (conscious or unconscious) of particular judges.

ii) The Canadian Society of Zoologists (Allison is a member) requires students who want to be considered in each competition to submit their talk abstract (for oral presentations) or their poster (as a PDF) 2-4 weeks prior to the meeting. A committee then evaluates all submissions prior to the meeting and selects the top 3-5 talks and posters to evaluate in person at the meeting. This significantly cuts down the amount of work by committee members and allows all evaluators to see all of the talks and posters in each competition making it easier to reach consensus on a winner.

CSPB Executive:

Current Executive:

Issues Identified:

1. The executive committee is currently composed of 11 individuals of whom 4 are women. All positions are volunteer. Members can self-nominate or be recruited by the senior director. This can lead to biases as more vocal members may be more likely to self-nominate. With only one senior director, there is potential for inherent bias in recruitment. Because nominations are strongly based on who the senior director knows or meets, the greater the diversity of the Senior Director and the Nominating Committee, the greater the chance for less well known plant biologists to be identified by colleagues or by interactions at smaller meetings. Note that

currently, as the chair of the nominating committee, the current senior director is one of three men serving on the committee.

Proposed Solutions:

i) One recommendation is for two Senior Directors with a requirement for equity across the two positions. An additional suggestion is for an East/West split. These two individuals could be laddered in their two-year positions, with the longer serving member acting as the chair of the Nominating Committee.

Committee Membership:

Issues Identified:

1. There are ten standing committees of the CSPB-SCBV. These include the committees charged with selecting winners for the prestigious society awards. Of the ten, four committees are chaired by women. Of note, the C.D. Nelson Award Committee is populated by 3 women, but the David J. Gifford Tree Biology Award Committee includes 3 men, as does the Gleb Krotkov Award Committee. As mentioned above, the more troubling committee make up is that of the Nominating Committee which also is composed of 3 men.

As mentioned above, because membership of the Nominating Committee drives membership of the other standing committees, this has the potential to be problematic. By adding a second Senior Director, the number of individuals on the Nominating Committee would be increased to four. This would more easily allow the achievement of an equitable split in member backgrounds and locations. This, in theory, should lead to greater diversity of individuals on committees and, in future, on the executive.

Proposed Solutions:

i) A good practice would be to promote a policy of equity across all the committees. The Nominating Committee would be charged with leading this effort, and in conjunction with the President and Past-President should develop an appropriate policy to bring to the membership. The flip side of this challenge is that people who are willing to self-identify as belonging to an underrepresented group may be overtaxed with service on committees, so we would have to be considerate of their time.

Definition of Post-Doctoral Researcher with the Society:

Issues Identified: The current definition of what a post-doc is within the society is vague.

Proposed Solutions:

i) It might be useful to refer to these persons as early career researchers or early career trainees. For example, "Early career trainee membership is open to researchers who have been granted a PhD and who are conducting research related to plant biology, but who have not yet begun an independent position (e.g. Assistant Professor or Group Leader)."

ii) This designation needs to respect the definition of the person's home institution, and the position to which the person has been hired. An individual should need to provide some sort of paperwork from their institution to confirm their postdoc status, as is the case with ASPB. At some level, it might not seem fair that some people may be considered postdocs for longer than others, but ultimately the position in which one has been hired should determine one's status. Taking this further, research associates should not be considered postdocs. At the core of the issue is that postdocs are considered trainees by NSERC and other agencies, while research associates are not.

iii) Particular awards, like the Carl Douglas Award, can be defined using this: "nominees must be early career trainees within X years since being awarded their PhD." This would effectively limit the award to postdocs, without having to deal with the issues of what people are called in their contracts (which can vary greatly between institutions, provinces, and countries). I believe the same eligibility exemptions we are proposing to apply to the C.D. Nelson Award (to extend the time past 10 years from gaining an independent position) should be applied to the Carl Douglas Award (to extend the time past X years from being granted a PhD).

Equity Statement:

Issues Identified:

1. It is challenging for one small committee to produce an inclusive equity statement that is reflective of the society, as a whole. Doing so in a rush to meet yearly deadlines would almost certainly lead to confusion and an outcome that does not reflect the needs of individuals who do not see themselves reflected in the general membership of the society. These are the same individuals who likely do not see themselves being adequately recognized by the society. Producing an equity statement that lauds lofty goals, but is pushed to a separate webpage does not seem to fit with the needs or wants of the society.
2. Lack of data on the composition of past and currently members with respect to diversity.
3. There is no code of conduct for society meetings.

Proposed Solutions:

i) To better reflect these needs and wants, one way forward is for the executive of the society to work on developing a Vision and Values Statement for the CSPB-SCBV. Placing a high value on equity and diversity, and their contributions to not only a strong, vibrant CSPB-SCBV, but a strong and vibrant plant biology research community in Canada would be a much better place to start. Placing this value of the society front and centre on our webpage would make a much stronger statement. The additional strength of developing a Vision and Values Statement that truly reflects the membership of the society, is that future changes to bylaws, policies, or codes of conduct can be made within the context of our common goals, rather than in one-off changes that may have unintended consequences. Working on such a statement over the next 14 months, with a goal of presenting it to the membership at the 2018 general meeting, would allow for meaningful consultation and feedback from members.

ii) Devise a way to collect and analyze data on member diversity for the society. For gender, biaswatchneuro (<https://biaswatchneuro.com/base-rates/base-rate-calculation/>) has some

interesting methods for calculating the percentage of women working in the field of neuroscience, which could be modified and applied here. They use this to calculate observed versus expected percentages of female organizers and speakers at conferences, but we could apply this to the society's committee/executive makeup. Other sources of diversity (age, culture, sexual orientation, etc) can be more difficult to track this way, and even gender calculations make some assumptions. What do we know about diversity in terms of the society's membership? Is there something we could be doing to recruit a broader diversity of members? In order to better track diversity, we could have a purely optional field in the membership form that allows individuals to self-identify with one or more underrepresented categories. This information – which we should stress is given on a purely voluntary basis - could be made available only to the executive, and used solely for the purpose of nominating people to committees. It would be worth reaching out to other Canadian scientific societies to ask how they are tracking these data and collecting this information while not violating privacy or equity legislation.

iii) Develop a code of conduct for society meetings and processes for reporting and addressing violations of that code of conduct.

Membership:

Diversity and Equity

Members of the committee have the sense that the diversity of our student and post-doc members is greater than that of our full members.

Proposed Solutions:

i) Putting in place measures that make the CSPB interesting and important for individuals from underrepresented groups, so that they feel welcome and “a part of things”, and thus become long-term members.

ii) Implementing a more formalized mentoring structure for junior scientists. In my recent discussions with new faculty members from visible minorities, it became apparent that they weren't fully aware of the benefits of networking etc. that the CSPB offers. This is doubly true for government scientists. So I think that more one-on-one mentoring may be required to reach some of these new faculty members, and make sure that they feel welcome and needed in the CSPB. This may help us grow proportions of underrepresented groups in the CSPB. Along these lines, I think that providing mentoring through the CSPB is one way to increase the odds of CSPB grad students going on to postdocs, postdocs landing faculty positions, and new faculty members doing well in their appointments. Sometimes people get all the mentoring that they need within their lab or institution, but oftentimes an external mentor can be extremely valuable. This is especially true for individuals from underrepresented groups, who can learn so much more from someone who shares some of their background and perspective. I have mentored several postdocs and junior faculty members informally through CSPB connections, and so I would like to see some sort of formal mentoring structure put in place within the CSPB.

iii) Providing resources that help all junior members of the CSPB, but especially those from underrepresented groups, succeed at attaining the next career stage. This could include

workshops at meetings and/or materials on the CSPB website in the forms of blog posts or website stories.

Conferences:

Issues Identified:

Particular meeting logistics (e.g. child-care, disability accommodations, and dietary accommodations) were identified by several members as cause for concern.

Proposed Solutions:

i) Meeting planning guides should be updated to reflect that the above considerations should be addressed by the local organizing committee for any CSPB meetings held in the future.

External to CSPB:

Issues Identified:

1. Promotion of the society and the attracting of new members.
2. Outreach activities by the society in person and online to improve knowledge and visibility of plant biology in Canada to members of the general public.
3. Advocacy roles in influencing government policy (e.g. NSERC's relatively new policy regarding child care cost reimbursement)
4. Ensuring that CSPB members have representation on grant review panels

Potential solutions:

i) The committee decided that these issues are beyond our current scope. Once the internal concerns are addressed, the CSPB get then turn its focus outward to address some of these issues.