Statement by the AEA Board and Staff
on follow up to the recommendations of the Membership Engagement, Diversity, and Leadership Development Task Force (MEDLD)

The AEA board and staff wish to express their gratitude to the Presidential Task Force on Membership Engagement, Diversity, and Leadership Development (MEDLD) for their work, report and recommendations, which have been extremely useful for us. Thank you for the commitment and time of task force members. We are pleased to report to the AEA membership on the follow up actions that are informed by and in line with the task force recommendations.

In 2017, then AEA President, Kathy Newcomer organized a Task Force on Membership Engagement, Diversity, and Leadership Development (MEDLD). Co-Chairs of the taskforce were: Melvin Hall and Robin Lin Miller. Other members included Lisa Aponte-Soto, Nicole Bowman, Stafford Hood, Leah C. Neubauer, Nicole Vicinanza, and Veronica Olazabal (AEA Board Liaison). Susan Tucker and Aimee White were “ex-officio” members as representatives of the AEA Board.

The MEDLD Task Force was to examine how AEA promotes, provides, and monitors equitable opportunities for engagement, professional development, and career advancement to members from all backgrounds. The group’s charge further included advising the AEA Board on how to monitor performance of MEDLD goals, devising a system of performance monitoring in cooperation with the Board’s Evaluation Oversight Task Force (EOTF), and coordinating with the Task Force charged with developing AEA’s professional competencies for evaluators.

At the time the MEDLD Task Force was established, the AEA had been implementing policy-based governance for 10 years (beginning in 2008), has experienced a growth in membership over that period, and had transitioned to a new management company (from Susan Kistler to SmithBucklin) for 2 years (starting in 2015). The AEA Board asked the MEDLD Task Force for deeper reflection into issues that have been central to the AEA Board: member engagement, diversity, and leadership development.

The Task Force was driven by a desire to ensure that the association's values and traditions, as they were lived when Susan Kistler was ED, wouldn't be compromised when we transitioned to SmithBucklin. Aligned with the TF charge, initially, a 7-step work plan was developed. However, due to a lack of data (existing and new, qualitative and quantitative), this work plan was revised. The revised work plan included recovering sources of institutional memory and interviews with 17 purposefully selected AEA members. Throughout the work of the MEDLD Task Force, a range of issues and concerns were discussed including the loss of institutional memory as the AEA has grown and transitioned to a new management company, the role of executive leadership, the criteria by which the Board evaluates the executive, and the adoption of the Carver model of policy-based governance. The MEDLD report recommendations were aligned with the commitment of the Board to membership engagement, leadership development and diversity.

What follows is a summary of the findings and recommendations adopted by the Board, and the actions taken by Staff.
**Member Engagement**

Understanding member engagement requires operationally defining and measuring at the organizational level how the Association provides support, status, recognition, opportunities, and depth of professional connections for all members. By developing these operational definitions and monitoring indicators the Association can make policy and operational decisions that enhance effectiveness in these essential areas. These operational definitions should likely be specified in AEA policies and procedures to ensure that member engagement has specific processes attached to it. Further, as AEA is a volunteer led and supported organization, AEA should have a specific set of volunteer management guidelines and processes that fully involve all of the potential participants including TIGs, Affiliates and the IOCE.

**Membership Diversity**

AEA would benefit from tracking its diversity activities more carefully and reassessing them regularly to ensure that these activities are leading to their intended activity outcomes and organizational impacts. Being an organization that embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion means being an organization that is willing to be changed by that diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Leadership Development**

Inquiry into the Association’s leadership development approach was guided by examining the structures and occasions where leadership opportunities were naturally found. This included activities where leadership skills were either recognized or might be honed, ways in which members with leadership interest and talent were identified and fostered, and policies that governed access to leadership opportunities (e.g., Nominations, Elections, Awards, Taskforce appointments etc.).

The Task Force concluded that leadership development should be an ongoing activity, with scheduled components throughout the year and clearly defined groups of people responsible for it. It should also have a set of guidelines that mandate diversity and inclusion of AEA members at all levels, from student to longstanding AEA member. This may mean that all working groups and task forces consider both diversity and differing levels of experience or seniority as part of their selection criteria.

**Recommendations**

To continually improve member engagement, diversity, and leadership development, the AEA is presented with four recommendations:

Recommendation #1 – Preserve and protect institutional memory and follow through
Recommendation #2 – Develop a contemporary statement on diversity
Recommendation #3 – Reengage Board members with a focus on engagement, diversity and leadership development.
Recommendation #4 – Align priorities (e.g. ends goals, values) with investments that cultivate member engagement, diversity and leadership development.
AEA Board and Executive Actions in Line with MEDLD Recommendations

The Board wishes to thank the members of the MEDLD Task Force for their commitment passion for the issues of member engagement, diversity, and leadership development. Below are the actions the Board and Executive Director (ED) have been undertaking either in parallel or in response to the MEDLD Task Force recommendations.

Recommendation #1 – Preserve and protect institutional memory and follow through

A. The Board is implementing a more transparent and regular annual agenda and strengthening its systems to keep track of decisions and issues to enable continuity in the Board’s work.

B. The Board has begun a process of recording its work beyond the recording of voting. This will increase transparency in the Board’s deliberations, and also enable greater continuity in the Board’s work.

C. The AEA ED is exploring an initiative to archive the AEA’s history.

Recommendation #2 – Develop a contemporary statement on diversity

A. AEA leadership has always been very supportive of CREA – past presidents have attended the CREA conference, been “affiliated faculty,” and been supportive of the CREA mission. AEA is intentionally deepening its partnership with CREA, aiming to foster a more robust, sustainable relationship. These include:
   a. Supporting CREA financially as a sponsor of the CREA conference ($3,000).
   b. Offering CREA complimentary meeting space during the AEA conference (waived $1500 room rental fee).
   c. Offering to promote CREA activities to AEA members via Eblast at no cost. Additional promotional vehicles considered upon request.

B. AEA president and ED are attending the bi-annual CREA conference and together will hold discussions for closer collaboration with CREA membership. We will also continue to host CREA pre-conference workshops at AEA conferences thus increasing culturally-responsive dialogue, training and education.

C. Increased budget support to the MSI fellowship program (beginning with 2020 budget, with additional increases over time).

D. Commissioned a working group to evaluate the GEDI program, led by Jennifer Greene and Katrina Bledsoe, as a way to harvest learning from this important program, and to develop ideas for its continuation and expansion. The group is scheduled to begin its work in April 2019.

E. Commissioned a working group to develop a contemporary statement on diversity (based on report recommendation). The group’s work will begin later this year. The group will report to the Executive Director, and a board liaison will be appointed to participate. The group’s recommendations will be shared with the board to inform the board on making an official statement on diversity

F. Reviewing demographic fields for all membership forms, surveys, etc. to ensure that they are diverse and politically correct. Currently editing fields to include indigenous nations.
G. Adding a clause to the speaker contracts for all AEA events to inform the speaker of AEA’s values, commitment to diversity and examples of language and actions that can be considered offensive to our audience.

H. The By Laws and approved policies include a commitment to member engagement, diversity and inclusion, and leadership development. Any revisions to the By Laws would be put to vote by membership.

I. The Board held a racial equity training in January to deepen its awareness of these issues and frame possible next steps, and will continue its plan for building greater equity and gender equality in our association.

J. The Board will be reviewing its evaluation plans in May 2019, and is planning to include the AEA values and policies in the criteria for evaluating AEA operations. Language affirming the AEA’s value for diversity, equity and inclusion is already embedded in the AEA’s Guiding Principles, and was enhanced in the last revision of the principles.

Recommendation #3 – Reengage Board members with a focus on engagement, diversity and leadership development

A. Overall, the Board has remained engaged in diversity and member engagement, and is in the process of incorporating this recommendation in line with policy-based governance.

B. As always, Board members are assigned to be liaisons with different AEA communities, and report to the Board on relevant developments and needs.

C. The Board and staff are tracking a list of venues for input and feedback including but not limited to EvalTalk, the AEA Portal, TIG Council, Affiliate leaders, CREA, EERS, as well through visits to affiliates and international evaluation gatherings.

D. The Board has always established task forces as one way to achieve broader member engagement for specific issues, and continues to do so.

E. To increase transparency in the work of the Board, the Board has agreed to share highlights of Board meetings (starting with the January 2019 meeting), and will continue to run Townhalls (established last year), share through AEA 365, EvalTalk, the Newsletter and the AEA website.

F. Expansion of membership engagement is achieved through working groups that actively advise the Executive Director in operations (see actions in earlier section), and complement Board engagement by making the Board’s intent a reality.

G. A key element the Board is focusing on is evaluation. Evaluation of operations is a way that the Board will ensure AEA policies (including related to membership engagement, diversity and leadership development) are indeed carried out appropriately, provide feedback to the executive, and adjust policies as needed to make them clearer. While some inroads have been made in this function, the Board will be tackling this in May 2019.

H. Held informational sessions for those interested in learning about or seeking leadership in AEA at Eval2018 in Cleveland. Two sessions were offered, and facilitated by Aimee White. The sessions were titled “Are you Interested in AEA Leadership”? These sessions will be offered annually.

I. The 2019 AEA Nominations Committee is diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, industry and AEA member history. Selections were made from pool of members who responded to the Call for Volunteers to join this group.
Recommendation #4 – Align priorities (e.g. ends goals, values) with investments that cultivate engagement, diversity and leadership development

A. One of immediate tasks of the MEDLD working group will be to update the AEA diversity statement that will be shared with the Board.

B. Member engagement goals are incorporated in the AEA’s Ends, Executive Limitations and Governing policies, and present in all Board discussions.