
Learn More About the Atla Board and its Work

Susan Ebertz, Atla Board President (2024–2025)

Beth Kumar, Atla Board Secretary (2024–2025)

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ABSTRACT: The Atla Board of Directors is responsible for guiding the strategic direction of Atla and ensuring that it meets the needs of its members. Rather than transcribing what was a largely informal question-and-answer and listening session, this article highlights the primary concerns, structural processes, and relationship-building efforts that characterize the Board’s governance model. The session provided insights into the Board’s composition, the concerns of both Board members and the general membership, and the Board’s engagement strategies to strengthen relationships and ensure effective governance. The session also offered an opportunity for Board members to gather feedback from constituent members, known as the “moral owners.”

Editorial note: *The authors utilized ChatGPT as a tool to summarize themes within the session transcript.*

INTRODUCTION

The Atla Board of Directors uses a form of governance known as Policy Governance, which was developed in the 1970s by John Carver and taught by his spouse Miriam Carver (Carver and Carver 2016a; Carver and Carver 2016b). This governance method focuses the Board on what are known as Organizational Ends, or the results that Atla members want to see from the organization. The Organizational Ends are drawn from member feedback. Board members present engaged in a question-and-answer and listening session with Atla Annual attendees, who are important organizational stakeholders and potential future Board members.

Four Board members convened the session: Beth Kumar, Karl Stutzman, Susan Ebertz, and Jérémie LeBlanc. Kumar is Director of Library Services at Graduate Theological Union (Berkeley, CA, USA) and is the Secretary for 2024–25. Stutzman is Director of Library Services at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, IN, USA) and is the Vice President for 2024–25. Susan Ebertz is Emerita Director of the Library at Wartburg Theological Seminary (Dubuque, IA, USA) and is the President for 2024–25. LeBlanc is Chief Librarian at Saint Paul University (Ottawa, ON, Canada) and served as President in 2023–24.

A central question presented by the Board members leading the session was whether attendees “see” themselves in Atla’s Organizational Ends, which were presented at the Annual Member Meeting on June 20, 2024 and which are available on Atla’s website (Atla “Mission & Organizational Ends,” n.d.).

COMPOSITION AND ROLES

The Atla Board of Directors, per the Bylaws of the association, has twelve members, all of whom are required to be individual members of the association and who are elected by the membership. Board members serve three-year terms and may be elected for a second consecutive term. The Board currently meets in person three times a year; one of these meetings is before Atla Annual. The Board also meets online numerous times for special meetings and committee meetings. The Board has four officers: a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Board members present explained that board service is all volunteer work and requires a high degree of focus and dedication as well as many hours of preparation and meetings. In addition to Atla’s governing bylaws, the Board operates from the *Atla Board Policy Manual*. These documents, as well as Board meeting minutes, are accessible to members via the Atla website. The Atla website also lists all Board members and includes a contact form for the Board (Atla “Board of Directors,” n.d.).

ENGAGEMENT WITH MEMBERS

One of the primary goals of the session was to foster engagement between the Board and the general membership. The Board invited questions and feedback from both in-person and online attendees, emphasizing the importance of transparency and open communication. This initiative aligns with the Board's commitment to building a culture of trust and transparency within Atla.

What is "Moral Ownership?"

A significant portion of the session focused on the concept of *moral ownership*, a term used to describe the stakeholders who have a vested interest in Atla. It was clarified that moral owners include all members of Atla; these are the stakeholders who contribute to and benefit from the organization's mission. This distinction underscores the inclusive nature of the Board's governance model.

Relationship Building

A recurrent theme in the session was the Board's concern about relationship building. Ensuring healthy and strong relationships between Board members, Atla staff, and the general membership is a priority. This focus on relational health is seen as essential for fostering a collaborative and supportive organizational culture. The Board has engaged in learning activities related to building relationships and sees this at the heart of its work.

Understanding Board Activities

There was an expressed need for greater clarity regarding the Board's activities. Members voiced a desire to better understand the Board's decision-making processes and the specific actions it undertakes. This feedback highlights the necessity for ongoing efforts to communicate the Board's roles and responsibilities more effectively. Members present were also interested in knowing what board service means and what is involved so that they can prepare for future service to the association.

Organizational Ends (OEs)

The session also addressed the Board's Organizational Ends (OEs), which outline the key objectives and goals of Atla. Feedback from the membership indicated a general alignment with these goals, though there were calls for more ambitious and risk-taking initiatives. One OE that generated considerable discussion was OE 1.4, which emphasizes the expression of varying spiritual traditions and life stances. The inclusion of "life stances" was a response to member feedback, demonstrating the Board's responsiveness to evolving member needs. A recently instituted collaboration between the Board and Atla staff is a detailed annual survey of members. This is an attempt to systematize the gathering of feedback from moral owners on the progress Atla is making toward reaching its OEs. This survey also allows the Board to survey the landscape and identify trends in the membership.

CONCLUSION

The Atla Board's open session at the annual conference provided valuable insights into the Board's composition, concerns, and engagement strategies. The emphasis on transparency, relationship building, and member feedback reflects the Board's commitment to effective governance and organizational health. Continued efforts to embrace future-facing leadership will be crucial for Atla's ongoing success and relevance.

REFERENCES

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