NATIONAL WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION

# Annual Report, 2025–26
## Submitted by the Governing Council
November 7, 2026

## Table of Contents


**President's Report....2**
- Governing Council & Executive Committee....2
- Task Forces....4
- Strategic Plan....5
- Looking Ahead....6

**Vice President....6**
- Executive Committee....6
- Conference....7
- Leadership and Development Committee....7
- Moving Forward....8

**Acting Treasurer Report....8**
- Operating Budget....8
- Fiscal Policies....10
- Executive Committee....10
- Finance Committee....11
- Recommendations....11
- Note on Executive Director....11
- Note on Treasurer....11
- Finance Committee....12
- Investments....12
- Reserves....13

**Secretary....13**
- Governing Council....13
- Executive Committee....13
- Governance & Compliance....13
- Looking Ahead....14

**Member-at-Large....14**
- Conference Proposal Review....14
- Event Programming....14

Finance Committee....15
Recommendations....15
**Member-at-Large & Member Liaison....16**
Governing Council....16
Recommendation moving forward:....17
Leadership & Development Committee....17
Programming, Member Liaison, & Constituency Groups....17
**Lesbian Caucus Chair....18**
Foundational Movements....18
Growing Our Membership: From Seed to Branch....18
Gathering with Purpose....18
Elevating Our Work....19
Challenges, Forecasting, and an Invitation....19
**Women of Color Caucus Chair....20**
WoCC Activities....20
Women of Color Leadership Project (WoCLP)....21
Governing Council Activities....21
**National Office....21**
Personnel....22
NWSA By the Numbers....22
Virtual Events....22
**Governing Council Composition Task Force....23**
**NWSA Name Task Force MEMORANDUM....31**

## President's Report

*Submitted by President Jessica N. Pabón (2025-27)*

### Governing Council & Executive Committee

The transition from Member-at-Large (MAL) to President was demanding and unexpectedly stressful—particularly during the first half of the year. Almost immediately, I was negotiating (and seeing from a new perspective) the strained relationship between the National Office and the Governing Council (GC)—a gap between labor expectations of the GC and actualizations of the GC (I took accountability for my part of this strain while in the MAL position). I began my term with a full GC, but there was immediate turnover: Dr. Laurie Essig resigned from her Member-at-Large position shortly after taking office and then her replacement—Dr. Celiany Rivera-Velázquez—also resigned shortly after taking office. Both cited their capacity and the significant demands of serving on the GC. While doing my best to manage the internal conflicts, I was determined to galvanize the energy and gain the trust of the remaining GC members—three of whom (all Members-at-Large) were new to NWSA leadership. I applied for and received a scholarship to attend a leadership training (Centering Leadership in Presence: Wielding Power For What Matters in Challenging Times) with Rev. angel Kyodo williams Rōshi

at the Omega Women's Leadership Center in New York. The experience was a transformative one for mind, body, and spirit and enabled me to engage the fractured GC with an open heart and with trust in my capacity as a leader with the skills to bring the group back together in order to keep NWSA afloat.

Shortly thereafter, our then-Executive Director (ED) Kristian Contreras informed us that she would not renew her contract with NWSA for a variety of reasons—chief among them, our budget would not allow for the maintenance of her salary. (Please note, she worked for NWSA for three years *without* health insurance, even as she advocated to ensure that the Operations and Infrastructure Manager [OIM] would have this benefit.) Following her notification, I called and facilitated multiple emergency meetings with the Executive Committee (EC) and the larger GC to manage the impending leadership transition, many of which centered around the question of how we could collectively hold the duties of the ED through distributing what felt possible and scaling back *significantly* on the rest. Just a few weeks after the ED notified us, the Treasurer, Hiram Ramirez, also resigned citing capacity limitations given a new administrative position he accepted. Given the critical nature of having a Treasurer, in June, I appointed the MAL Melinda Chen as Acting Treasurer. Over those summer months, our emergency meetings also served as opportunities for the GC to express their collective perception that I had become rather insular in my presidential duties while managing the internal turmoil and they wanted more transparency.

In addition to the emergency meetings, I chair the GC meetings (every 6 weeks or so) and Executive Committee (EC) meetings (monthly). As President, I sit on all committees: Leadership & Development, Finance, and Governance and Compliance; I reactivated the Governance and Compliance committee, chaired by the Secretary, on the recommendation of the then-ED. That committee revised old and developed new policies (e.g. webinars and recordings, the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Code of Ethics, and the Code of Ethics Appeal Process). Sitting on these committees, I recruit reviewers and am a reviewer of conference proposals, graduate scholarships, travel grants, book awards, etc. Today, I am happy to describe the GC as a united front—stronger now that we have struggled through our conflicts in spirited conversations with open hearts and open minds.

Recognizing that as the remaining and singular staff person, our OIM's responsibilities were about to increase significantly and agreed that a new title and a new salary were in order. As she was transitioning out of her ED role, Dr. Contreras assisted the Finance Committee and the Personnel Committee (the EC) with contract development and negotiations. As of July, our Operations and Infrastructure Manager is now a Senior Operations and Infrastructure Manager (SOIM).

In addition to my baseline presidential duties, I assist the SOIM in managing our email inboxes, ensuring we have social media content, and meeting with various vendors and interlocutors. I have also independently generated protocols, procedures, and initiatives including: Electing the Member Liaison, GC Meeting Reports, Virtual Programming, Removal of a Governing Council Member, and starting a Local Access Solidarity Fund. Having a more intimate sense of the day-to-day tasks of the SOIM and the ED, I can see that having only one or two staff members is beyond unreasonable. For the month of October, to help the SOIM manage the incredible

amount of tasks in preparation for the annual conference, the GC voted to hire a temporary part-time Operations Assistant for an amount not to exceed $2,000USD.

Much of the time that would have been spent strengthening NWSA's position within the larger feminist movement ecosystem was reallocated to various “meet the moment efforts”—some, as noted above, were herculean in nature. The most time intensive efforts included visioning, workshopping, and releasing what I referred to as the “Slow Burn Plan.” I shared the details of this plan with membership in a July newsletter titled *Lighting Our Own Fires*, where I expressed that “Together we can plant the seeds for new association growth in the areas that have burned. It is only through our collective efforts that we will make it possible for the National Women's Studies Association to continue holding the space for critical feminist ideation and feminist cultural production for the next 50 years.” One crucial aspect of the plan was the recommendation that NWSA pivot to hosting the annual conference every other year and support regional gatherings organized by our members and sibling associations (e.g. WGS South) in the off years. After many months of intense contract negotiations with our Hilton and conference-site representatives, the cost of cancelled contracts made it impossible to make that change. Thus, we will convene annually in 2027 (St. Louis), 2028 (Portland), and 2029 (Milwaukee), as planned.

Prior to her June 30, 2026 departure, I worked closely with the Executive Director to reduce the costs associated with our primary expense: the conference. The 46th annual conference *Wild Feminisms* will feature 2 plenaries and 3 presidential sessions (1 of which is a performance). We made every effort to locate local speakers to reduce the travel and lodging expenses historically incurred, and also to make good on our commitment to “staying local” to our host city (as we have been doing since Past President Lewis's term). The Finance Committee authored a document to explain the Conference Logistics & Resources Changes we had to make in order to further reduce costs while we stabilize; these include reductions to our Travel and Registration Grants, the elimination of remote and hybrid presentations, and a change in how childcare is offered to a member-provider direct billing agreement.

I identified two Atlanta-based conference co-chairs whose work exemplified the theme and my desire to bring the body and an ecological frame to the conference. Along with the ED (until her departure) and OIM, we met every other week throughout the year to plan the conference—ensuring that the history and energy of Atlanta is represented the entire time via the local committee. Buoyed by the extraordinarily positive response we had to the emphasis on embodiment, praxis, and interactive sessions in the call for proposals (and excited by the possibilities identified during our site visit to Hilton Atlanta in February), this year we have introduced more somatic offerings and spaces for wellness.

## Task Forces

I inherited two task forces from past president Lewis: the Association Name Task Force and the Governing Council Composition Task Force. When I came into office, both task forces reported similar roadblocks and requested direction for moving forward given the difficulties of energizing members to participate in surveys and planned focus groups while navigating the stressors of the sociopolitical moment. In July, after consulting with Dr. Lewis and the GC, I informed both groups that since we were in the process of triaging our commitments,

initiatives, and programs to focus on what is critical to keeping NWSA operational without an ED, that discontinuing the work of both task forces made the most sense. This was a difficult but necessary decision. The work of the Governing Council Composition Task Force still feels urgent as I recognize there are many who feel underrepresented and/or ignored in or by NWSA leadership and because the capacity of our board is limited by the number of members. The work of the Association Name Task Force feels like an important part of our efforts to stabilize and strengthen the organization—perhaps a different name would act as a kind of rebrand, opening our "arms" to a wider feminist community of nonacademics, activists, artists, etc.

For transparency, and to recognize the importance of the labor the committees were able to accomplish, I asked each committee to submit a report in time for inclusion here. The Governing Council Composition Task Force was able to provide their final report and the Name Task Force offered a preliminary memorandum (a final report is forthcoming); both are included at the end of this document.

## Strategic Plan

I shared my strategic plan, *An Invitation to a Collective Reorientation*, in January 2026 after a week-long intensive orientation/planning retreat with the then-Executive Director (ED) and the then-OIM. By June, it was clear that I would have to pivot from and/or pause some of the initiatives outlined therein to meet the moment, to focus on supporting the association through a period of internal turbulence and difficulty and the uncertainty of the association's future given the external social, political, and financial attacks on our field, our members, and our social justice values. What has not changed, however, is my stated commitment to paying close attention to *how* we practice our feminisms within, and in the name of, the Association.

Beginning in February, I held monthly office hours to provide members clear and dedicated time to connect with me. The time and day of the week worked for 22 members, but many others made appointments conducive to their schedules. Office hours have proven useful and I will continue to make myself available in this way. In response to increasing requests for support from NWSA members, I have re-activated the Academic Freedom Task Force (an effort led by Karma Chávez and Rana Jaleel).

In March, Past President Lewis and I went live on Instagram for a "Passing the Baton: Launching the 2025-2027 Strategic Plan" conversation, which now lives on the NWSA account. While I produced 6 "Not All News is a Bummer" videos highlighting information from the newsletters—due to a drastic shift in my capacity given my increased obligations as I stepped into a defacto Executive Director role—I continue to record impromptu reels and stories to reach our members on social media.

In April I held the first meeting with my Advisory Board; the members are Iris Morales (community activist); Jenn Brandt (prior Program Administration and Development member); Sekile Nzinga (prior Women's Centers Committee member), and tayla shanaye (somatic educator and healing justice practitioner). Though they were each recruited for their specializations and experience, in practice these individual specializations are overshadowed by their collective energy, generative overlaps, and shared commitments.

***Note**: Members should direct any questions and/or concerns to the Member Liaison (membersatlarge@nwsa.org) with "Annual Report" in the subject line.*

In addition to my presence at many of the virtual community engagement opportunities facilitated by the rest of the Governing Council, I've also facilitated a variety of connections:

- January: “Keeping Feminism in Circulation,” with Dr. Agatha Beins and Puerto Rican Feminisms Interest Group member Jace N. Ríos Rivera; 29 folks registered
- April: “Processing Pop-Up: Feminists Reckoning with César Chávez's History of Sexual Abuse; ” 24 folks registered
- July: “A Conversation on Leadership Transitions with President Pabón;” 26 registered. **During this meeting, members came ready to organize and troubleshoot. The now-launched Stabilization Ad Hoc Committee is the manifestation of the energy in that virtual room.

Though I have not had the time or capacity to build the connections to as many feminist organizations outside of academia as I initially hoped, I have made some inroads with The Feminist Art Project, Right to Be, and Bi Women Quarterly.

## Looking Ahead

In this next year, the Association's 50th, I intend to reactivate our regional chapters with the newly reestablished Northwest Women's Studies Association as a model. I have launched a Stabilization Ad Hoc Committee to focus on fundraising under an “NWSA at 50” initiative. The theme for the 2027 gathering will be celebratory, given our anniversary, and focused on feminist joy. Even though 2026 was a wild ride, I am buckled in for what is to come in 2027—ready to celebrate all that we have weathered together and ready to look ahead to the next 50 years of radical feminist scholarship and activism at NWSA.

*Back to the Table of Contents*

# Vice President

*Submitted by Vice President Kristina Gupta (2025-26)*

### Executive Committee

This year has involved a great deal of emergency meetings for the EC and the GC, as the Executive Director, the Treasurer, and two members-at-large resigned. As Vice President, I have participated in these meetings and have weighed in on a number of urgent issues, such as the contract renewal for our Senior Operations and Infrastructure Manager.

I have also participated in a number of routine actions, such as approving the conference travel grant recipients and reviewing Author-Meets-Critics and graduate scholarship award submissions.

## Conference

Together with Melinda Chen, I served as co-chair of the proposal review committee for the conference sub-theme "Wild Relations." This involved recruiting proposal reviewers, reviewing proposals, and grouping proposals into panels after all proposals had been reviewed.

I am also serving as moderator for the Presidential Session, "In Madness: Crip Feminist Strategies for Embracing the Wild with Care." This involves organizing a pre-conference meeting with session panelists as well as developing session prompts.

## Leadership and Development Committee

As Vice President, I have been responsible for chairing the Leadership and Development Committee. According to the bylaws, "the Leadership and Development Committee coordinates leadership and development initiatives in partnership with the ED (e.g., the Association's mentorship program) and ensures the integrity of NWSA elections."

In February, I hosted office hours for constituency group chairs to support them in submitting proposals for sponsored sessions at the national conference.

In the summer, the Leadership and Development Committee ran elections for the NWSA Governing Council. This involved recruiting members to run, hosting a "Meet the GC/Be the GC" webinar, verifying candidates were eligible to run, meeting with candidates to vet their interest in serving on the Governing Council, creating a ballot in Election Buddy, and notifying candidates about the election outcome. Candidates were successfully recruited for all positions except President-Elect. 14% of NWSA members voted in the election, an increase over the 11% of NWSA members who voted in the 2025 Governing Council Elections. The results of the 2026 NWSA Governing Council elections are as follows:

- Vice President: Stephanie Andrea Allen
- Treasurer: Samantha Pinto (1 year term)
- Secretary: Maria Rovito
- Women of Color Caucus Chair: Kimberly Stanley
- Lesbian Caucus Chair: Jessica Pruett
- Members-at-Large: Nadia E. Brown and Ra Malika Imhotep

Newly elected officers will be introduced at the Membership Assembly at the conference and will be invited to participate in the Governing Council meeting that will take place on Sunday at the Conference.

The Leadership and Development Committee is also responsible for orienting the newly elected officers. We organized informal meetings between current office holders and incoming office holders and began to organize an official board training for early December.

The Leadership and Development Committee also ran elections for the Chairs of constituency groups. This has involved recruiting members to run, verifying candidates were eligible to run, confirming that candidates nominated by others were willing to run, and creating ballots in Election Buddy. Unfortunately, this endeavor was not very successful. Only 3 constituency

groups had candidates run for chair. Elections took place from September 30th – October 14th, 2026. Then, candidates were informed about election results, and winning candidates were provided with the Constituency Group Chair Handbook and were encouraged to meet with outgoing chairs of their respective constituency groups.

The Leadership and Development Committee also created a workflow plan outlining all of the major tasks of the committee as well as who is responsible for each of these tasks.

### Moving Forward

The Vice President and Leadership and Development Committee will need to re-evaluate the role of constituency groups, as currently the constituency group infrastructure is not very robust, evidenced by the fact that only 3 groups had candidates run for chair.

*Back to the Table of Contents*

## Acting Treasurer Report

*Submitted by Melinda Chen (July 2026 - November 2026)*

In May 2026, Dr. Hiram Ramirez stepped down from the position of Treasurer. This decision was made due to Dr. Ramirez's decreased availability following a change in his professional institution and the need for increased dedication to the role of Treasurer following the resignation of former Executive Director Dr. Kristian Contreras only a month earlier.

The position of Treasurer remained vacant until July 2, 2026, when NWSA President Dr. Jessica N. Pabón nominated me, Dr. Melinda Chen, as Acting Treasurer and the Governing Council formally voted to appoint me into this position. Previously, I was serving as NWSA Member-at-Large and was the lone remaining member of the Finance Committee, aside from the President, following the resignation of former Member-at-Large Dr. Laurie Essig. Dr. Ramirez's prior work with NWSA made this transition relatively seamless. Clearly devoted to the organization and in anticipation of his departure, Dr. Ramirez developed and left behind substantial documents regarding the role and responsibilities of the Treasurer, including access to financial records, bookkeeping files, and a schedule of events and activities that the Treasurer must complete.

In the Acting Treasurer position, I have worked to sustain the organization's financial position so that the next Treasurer can step into this role with as much grace and knowledge as possible. This work has included keeping an active eye on NWSA's operating expenses, updating financial policies, reviewing grants and financial questions, conducting outreach and sponsorship requests, and other activities meant to maintain our organization's fiscal standing.

### *Operating Budget*

As a part of this report, a draft of the proposed 2027 Operating Budget is linked here. Note: Projections for 2026 included several typos by substantive measures; therefore, this budget

proposal may substantially look differently than the previous year. Though this is only a projection and may be modified based on organizational needs, it provides a broad overview of the organization's finances for the following fiscal year. Major changes to this upcoming fiscal year's proposals compared with the previous year(s)' proposals include:

1. **No Executive Director Payroll**
   *See "Note on Executive Director" (below) regarding Executive Director departure & fiscal changes*.

2. **Hiring part-time and seasonal (conference) employees as necessary**
   As of this report submission, NWSA retains one full-time staff member with benefits, Senior Operations & Infrastructure Manager (SOIM) Courtney Carroll. In July, while contemplating how we might move with the resignation of our Executive Director, the Finance Committee, in conversation with the full Governing Board, determined that we could not afford to lose the expertise of Carroll, who has been with us since 2020, and we offered her a $7,000 one-time retention stipend to 1) continue her work in operations, including preparation for the 2026 annual conference, and 2) take on some additional responsibilities of the organization following the departure of Dr. Contreras temporarily, until appropriate Governing Board members are onboarded and can share responsibilities.

   This upcoming year, the budget proposal makes no reflection of this stipend. However, in recognition that our SOIM is currently working at high (exceeded) capacity, the 2027 budget proposal reflects the desire to hire additional staff to support the SOIM's work, e.g., answering emails, processing membership payments or conference changes, website management, etc.

3. **Reduced operating expenses**
   The annual budget project for 2026 included several key budget lines dedicated to professional services, including attorneys and additional accounting support. In part, these services were necessary to finalize decisions from prior fiscal mismanagement. In 2027, while we still leave room for emergencies, we do not anticipate the need for major professional services.

In addition to the changes to our operating budget, the 2027 budget reflects budget categorization changes. Last year, Dr. Contreras and Dr. Ramirez began the process of streamlining our Quick Book categorizations to match how our organization actually gains or loses funds, which in turn should support a more transparent and accurate contextualization of NWSA's organizational financial health. For example, we changed the category of individual purchases into specific Shopify or Stripe sales, which specifies the profit we make from individual conference registrations. I worked with the SOIM and our accountants to ensure accuracy of these changes. We expect to move forward with these new categorizations for the future.

Quarterly reports are available upon request to treasurer@nwsa.org.

### *Fiscal Policies*

Previous Treasurer work has been toward compliance on federal taxes and with the state of Maryland regarding our nonprofit status, and the recording of financial transactions. For example, Dr. Ramirez developed key protocols and procedures for processing payments over $20,000. These were critical activities, given the need for restabilization per past President Dr. Heidi R. Lewis.

As Acting Treasurer, I have not made significant changes to NWSA's fiscal policies, except to alter who may access financial accounts and the main contact or point person responsible for each activity. These changes were made due to changes in leadership and staffing. Previously, many financial activities were under the purview of the NWSA Executive Director in concert with the NWSA Treasurer. Given that we no longer have an Executive Director and no active Treasurer, I altered the policies to allow the Acting Treasurer access to and management of our financial accounts; to expand or reaffirm the scope of the President's access to and management of our financial accounts; and expand access to and management of our financial accounts to the SOIM and relevant staff. These are logistics changes only. Checks and balances on Presidential, staff, and Treasurer activities remain in place and/or require additional checks with the Governing Council at-large. The Governing Council has reviewed these policy changes.

In conversation with the Finance Committee, we created a workflow plan between the National Office staff and the GC. Again, due to gaps in leadership and staffing, this plan development was necessary. We divided tasks and responsibilities according to our expertise and appropriate purview (e.g., elected position vs staff, specialized knowledge) with the understanding that we would work closely with one another in instances of uncertainty. This workflow plan has, in part, mended relations between the National Office and Governing Council.

### *Executive Committee*

As *Acting* Treasurer, I am not a voting member of the EC. However, I participated meaningfully in all executive meetings. These meetings have largely focused on contract revisions and negotiations with our NWSA full-time and part-time staff; conference logistics, awards, approvals, and discussion of possible changes; and credit card and banking tasks.

A key conversation within the EC was the idea to change the annual NWSA conference into a conference held every other year, to recoup costs mainly from staffing and conference facilities and expand networking and outreach to our members. I worked with our staff and EC members to consider the financial ramifications of such a change; however, we determined that, though this idea could support fashioning stronger relationships between us as the national organization and our regional conference partners and associations, we unfortunately did not have the funds to feasibly make this change.

### *Finance Committee*

Beginning July 2026, I convened a monthly Finance Committee meeting. Recognizing the need for additional committee members, President Dr. Pabón nominated Lesbian Caucus Chair and Governing Council member Dr. Dominique C. Hill to the Finance Committee. I also brought in additional Governing Council members as necessary to serve on the Finance Committee, e.g., Member-at-Large Dr. Maria Rovito.

In this very short timespan, the Finance Committee conducted several key tasks, including a review of the budget quarterly, approvals for specific budget items such as A/V equipment and website plans, outreach to over 100 possible exhibitors and sponsors, and travel grant recommendations to the Executive Committee. I hold deep gratitude for Dr. Hill, Dr. Pabón, Dr. Rovito, and others who supported the Finance Committee's wide-ranging activities.

Prior to my position as Acting Treasurer, I supported outreach activities and identified possible grants to which NWSA could apply, in anticipation that I would assist with grant writing. Upon entering this role, however, grant writing became too onerous to take on with my additional new and sudden responsibilities. I have listed possible grants for which NWSA could apply in our records for future Treasurers to consider.

## Recommendations

This past year has seen substantial changes to our leadership and staffing, which in turn has shaped our fiscal policies, direction, and activities. There are several key changes that I would be remiss to not recommend.

### *Note on Executive Director*

All recommendations are made with the acute awareness that we are currently operating without an ED. For the time being, as I serve in an acting capacity only, I make recommendations for next year's budget assuming that NWSA will operate without an ED and will not conduct an active search next year. I leave it to the incoming Treasurer to determine whether hiring an Executive Director at this time is appropriate.

As we move through these changes to leadership and staffing, it is likely that there are lingering policy gaps and missteps based on our current circumstances. I recommend that the Treasurer maintains a close eye on these policies and to revise them to match realistic logistics needs, with Governing Council approval and National Office staff, such as updating policies on financial account access.

### *Note on Treasurer*

Given the changes in leadership, it is recommended that persons seeking to nominate themselves to the Treasurer position have sufficient experience in accounting and/or finances, or sufficient time dedicated to learning how to manage a nonprofit organization's budget. The Treasurer should also be onboarded quickly to the role, especially as transferring some of our financial accounts requires time. The work to develop onboarding materials has, in part, been

completed by former Treasurer Dr. Ramirez, and we have met last year's recommendation to develop training materials. Now, it is time to ensure that adequate onboarding is carried out.

### *Finance Committee*

The Finance Committee conducts a high number of activities, ranging from outreach to budgetary proposals. For this reason, I recommend that the President and Treasurer add more people, e.g., Members-at-Large, to this committee.

One unfortunate loss with the shift in leadership is the absence of any grant writing. Grant writing is key for a nonprofit organization like NWSA to gain some funds so that we can carry out and enhance our regular operating activities. Although I am extremely mindful of the dangers of grants, especially conditional ones (see INCITE's *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, 2017), unconditional or limited condition grants would likely support NWSA's mission well by providing the space and time to advance our work as a national professional association and enhancing our connections to Gender Studies faculty, staff, and students in this very challenging moment.

Because we have not had sufficient membership on the Finance Committee, we have been unable to carry out any grant writing. Indeed, this year, NWSA returned an Intention Foundry grant that we had received from the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) because we did not have the labor or people power to carry out the grant. The Finance Committee must have sufficient membership to not only apply for grants but *to follow through with them*.

### *Investments*

Of note, I have recommended to the Executive Committee that NWSA hires a financial advisor. NWSA currently holds most of its assets in an operating account, but maintains a money market account with Truist and a social investment account with Domini. These assets combined average about $350,000 - $500,000 depending on the 2026 fiscal quarter, and in reserve, we maintain about $280,000 in funds set aside for investment gains. Other professional associations of similar size, like the Society for the Study of Social Problems, have worked with financial advisors to improve their investment gains and in ways that align with their values. Currently, our accounts average less than 1% in annual gains, which does not even match inflation and cost of living raises. It is my view that NWSA should “put its money where its mouth is at” and invest in feminist projects, which can collectively benefit those in whom we are investing and our work here at the largest Gender Studies professional association nationally.

GC members are not always elected into their positions based on previous experience; similarly, we should not expect that the Treasurer will always be intimately familiar with accounting. Moreover, the Treasurer already fulfills many tasks and has regular duties while serving on the Board, limiting their time to seek out careful investments. Our current circumstances lead me to believe that NWSA is better positioned to hire a part-time financial advisor with specific expertise in feminist investment, than to ask the Treasurer to take on this additional responsibility. Some activities that a part-time financial advisor could work on

include recalibrating our investments to more profitable and values-aligned stocks and identifying higher yield savings or CD accounts.

### *Reserves*

I do not recommend that the organization withdraw any of our reserves, following the guidance of former Executive Director Dr. Contreras. Given that the organization is still recovering from the misappropriation of funds from the 2020-2023 presidency and that, each year, NWSA borrows funds to cover that year's conference expenses, NWSA should hold onto its reserves. This recommendation is in effect until the organization recuperates sufficient funds such that we are not borrowing funds "from the future." We remain an under-resourced nonprofit organization and professional association.

*Back to the Table of Contents*

## Secretary

*Submitted by Umme Al-wazedi (2024-26)*

### Governing Council

As Secretary, I am responsible for managing NWSA's corporate records in partnership with the Executive Director. Now that we do not have an ED, my partnership is mostly with the President. I also collaborate with the President to ensure proper notice for the Governing Council (GC), Executive Committee (EC), and Membership Assembly (MA) meetings.

As part of the responsibility of the Secretary, and under the presidency of Dr. Jessica N. Pabón, I continue to keep records and manage communication among the GC members.

### Executive Committee

In this capacity, I work with the President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Executive Director to ensure that resources are used to fulfill NWSA's purpose, mission, vision, commitments, and operations. I reviewed proposals for the Ann K. Schonberger Registration Waiver and Travel Grant and the Graduate Student Scholarship for the upcoming conference.

### Governance & Compliance

The most important work that I have been doing is reviewing compliance documents and creating new ones as I chair the Governance and Compliance Committee. This year, I have been working with the committee to revise the Association's Code of Ethics document. The Code of Ethics has not been revised for/in many years. There were aspects that were no longer valid, such as committees that are no longer in existence. In addition, there was a lack of consistency in the use of language throughout the document. So, many edits were made with the help of the GC members. With the help of an additional GC member, Dr. Victoria Reyes, I have worked to finalize the appeal process of the Code of Conduct. I have also created a

meeting protocol document. In addition, with the help of the committee member, Dr. Maria Rovito, we have created a document about AI use in submitting abstracts. We are also in the process of finalizing a protocol document for hosting webinars and its storage policy.

### Looking Ahead

Moving forward, I will be onboarding the new secretary, Dr. Maria Rovito. I have sent out documents for the new GC members so that they can begin their onboarding.

*Back to the Table of Contents*

## Member-at-Large

*Submitted by Melinda Chen (2025-27)*

As Member-at-Large, my role is to contribute to Governing Council activities and address membership needs. Toward this end, I conducted three main activities:

1. Conference Proposal Review
2. Event Programming, related to membership needs
3. Finance Committee

In July 2026, I stepped into the Acting Treasurer position and temporarily paused or redistributed Member-at-Large activities to the remaining Members-at-Large, Drs. Maria Rovito and Victoria Reyes. I plan to resume my Member-at-Large duties once the newly elected Treasurer, Dr. Samantha Pinto, formally steps into the position. My Member-at-Large report remains distinct from Drs. Rovito and Reyes for this reason.

### *Conference Proposal Review*

In this role, with Vice President Dr. Kristina Gupta, we reviewed 80+ annual conference proposals under the subtheme “Wild Relations,” and grouped proposals into panels and sessions. I also took on additional papers for review.

### *Event Programming*

*NWSA Pedagogy Series*
Our field is presently under extreme scrutiny and attack, with those most vulnerable including graduate teaching assistants, staff, and contingent faculty and instructors who teach Gender Studies. In recognition of these difficult circumstances, I developed the NWSA Pedagogy Series to support our vulnerable members teaching critical feminist subjects. This series aims to equip attendees with knowledge of key and emerging feminist pedagogical practices and practical strategies for addressing the given topic within feminist pedagogies at hand.

The kickoff event was concerned with transnational feminist pedagogies. We brought in the editors and some authors of *Transnational Feminist Pedagogies*, a recently published

collection, to speak about their teaching practices. 14 people attended this first event, with high interest in continuing this series.

The second event was concerned with age in the classroom and the ways that age influences how we are perceived and navigate our Gender Studies classrooms. As with our first event, we sought to partner with educators working on this specific subject, and Dr. Saskia Furst and Ms. Juanita Crider of the Age & Ageism Caucus graciously offered their time and expertise to support our agenda. 7 people attended this event. It is likely that the summer period in which the event occurred influenced attendance; nonetheless, the event brought in generative dialogue and showcased key need and desire for greater support in this area.

One burgeoning relationship that NWSA has been kindling is in relation with the *Women's Studies Quarterly* journal's section, *Fieldnotes*. *Fieldnotes* aims to share pedagogical activities and related information to teaching in Women's and Gender Studies. I have worked to build a relationship with *WSQ* with the hopes that NWSA can meaningfully partner on feminist pedagogies.

*Academic Freedom Caucus*
Similar to the efforts to program around feminist pedagogies, there is a strong need to mobilize feminist scholars and their efforts to sustain academic freedom at this time. With then-NWSA members Drs. Laurie Essig and Kristian Contreras, I helped to organize and contributed to a panel on academic freedom in conjunction with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Center on Academic Freedom leaders Drs. Rana Jaleel and Karma Chávez.

About 75 people attended this Zoom session. This is incredibly high attendance for an online event, and one that demonstrates a continued, strong interest from our membership for NWSA to continue its advocacy work in resistance to fascist regimes and spearheading feminist struggle for academic freedom.

## *Finance Committee*

*See Acting Treasurer Report.*

## *Recommendations*

Generally, Members-at-Large should continue to conduct regular programming, enhancing NWSA's offerings beyond the annual conference. This would help to move us as an organization from a "conference" association into a full-fledged professional academic, advocacy, and knowledge-generating organization.

As an extension of my activities on the Finance Committee, I recommend that Members-at-Large develop and carry out programming with an associated fundraising component. For example, we could develop a summer feminist "professional development" training program or a "feminist methods" program that prepares students or those with an interest returning to / in academic feminisms to the job and job market. Fundraising can occur through institutional investments or individual donor contributions. Indeed, these proposals align with previous Treasurers' and Members-at-Large's recommendations for a Speakers'

Bureau, in which portions of the speaker fees are donated to NWSA. These programming-fundraising activities can both support membership while raising sorely needed funds for the organization.

It is also recommended that these activities are connected and/or in conversation with constituency groups. Our constituency groups are sometimes detached from the work of the National Office or Governing Board, and one way to bridge these relations is to collaborate, which in turn makes for more interesting, more applied, and more sustainable work.

*Back to the Table of Contents*

## Member-at-Large & Member Liaison

*Submitted by Victoria Reyes (2025-27)*

### Governing Council

I was elected as a Member-at-Large (MAL) from 2025-2027 and just completed my first year on the Governing Council. While I was unable to attend the annual conference in November, one of my first acts as MAL-elect was to attend the September 2025 MAL training. Once the Governing Council began our work post-conference, including board training in January 2026, I was and continue to be an active and engaged participant in our meetings and discussions. I've provided extensive comments on proposals for reimagining NWSA governance structures and processes, worked on developing Constituency Group engagement as MAL and Member Liaison, including but not limited to programming and onboarding. I should note that during this time, NWSA underwent a turbulent leadership transition, and in the summer of 2026 the Executive Director chose to not seek to renew her contract.

As part of the Governing Council, I served as a co-chair of the Proposal Review subcommittee on “Rewilding Feminisms.” The responsibilities of co-chairs include recruiting volunteers to serve as reviewers, reviewing proposals, and ensuring the entire team / all of the assigned proposals to our subcommittee are evaluated vis-à-vis substantial comments and scoring based on a provided rubric. I should note that after securing reviewers, my co-chair resigned from the Governing Council. I then led the committee in reviewing proposals by myself, including those assigned to my non-existent co-chair and those that volunteer reviewers did not complete. Altogether, I  completed the grouping of papers into 37 panel sessions; personally reviewing an estimated 100 proposals. This was an extremely difficult situation to be in. Although I previously served as a proposal reviewer for the 2020 NWSA conference and also read over and watched the National Office's written and video instructions, I felt overwhelmed. Indeed, the National Office and President emailed me, noting that they understood if I needed a bit more time given that I was without a co-chair. Given the tumultuous transition—which included tense meetings and exchanges—alongside it being my first year on the Council, each Council member already co-chairing a proposal review subcommittee, and dealing with personal and department matters within my university, I felt uncomfortable asking for assistance. I now have a better idea of how I'd like to approach proposal reviewing for the following year and am more comfortable requesting assistance.

***Note**: Members should direct any questions and/or concerns to the Member Liaison (membersatlarge@nwsa.org) with “Annual Report” in the subject line.*

**Recommendation moving forward:**

To have a Governing Council meeting dedicated to collectively going over the responsibilities and role of the subcommittee chairs, including how to recruit members and providing suggestions for the process such as encouraging subcommittees to meet or have a collective email exchange to ensure everyone is on the same page, among others.

Finally, I was asked by the Secretary, on behalf of the Governance & Compliance committee, to draft an appeal process for the Code of Conduct. I drafted one based on restorative justice research and renamed the document "Procedures and Policies for Feedback & Complaints."

## Leadership & Development Committee

As per NWSA bylaws, MALs serve on either the Finance Committee, Leadership & Development Committee, or the Governance & Compliance Committee. I serve on the Leadership & Development committee. Similar to the GC, where we are collectively reimagining the organization, led by our NWSA President, the responsibilities of the L&D committee are also undergoing a reimagining of the possibilities and vision for the committee. Please note that my labor on this committee overlaps with my responsibilities as Member Liaison. Some of these responsibilities include but are not limited to advertising GC and Constituency Group elections and updating and revising current NWSA election graphics. I created tailored graphics for calls for chairs of constituency groups, including information such as the chair's responsibilities and possible activities for the groups, among others. I should note that while I created graphics for GC positions, I was unable to distribute them in time. For next year, we have an updated version of these graphics to share. I posted and shared the Constituency Group elections on the community hub and also reached out directly to the 26 people who are named as chairs in NWSA records regarding signing up for Constituency Group business meetings at the annual conference.

## Programming, Member Liaison, & Constituency Groups

A large part of MAL responsibilities is member engagement, and community programming has traditionally been the way in which MALs fulfill this responsibility. After being elected as Member Liaison, I began planning outreach with Constituency Groups to understand their needs, concerns, and also remind CGs of the possibilities of their activities, including but not limited to writing statements on pressing issues to be sent to the President and National Office—both of whom may elect to publish these statements—offer awards to members, and creating internal leadership opportunities. I personally reached out to all people listed in NWSA records as chair(s) of 29 CG. Many people did not reply. Some indicated that they no longer serve in that capacity (hence the discrepancy between 29 vs 26 chairs). Yet, many also responded and I met with and/or been in direct contact via email with no less than 9 such groups. I've been taking notes and plan to draft a report to share with the GC (and preferably with the membership) regarding recommendations.

Additionally, I've held monthly MAL office hours, to which a handful of people have attended thus far and have actively attended and participated in webinars and events organized by the NWSA National Office as well as those organized by fellow members of the Governing Council, both those aimed at general membership and those for co-working with other members of the

Governing Council. I have been asked by the Acting Treasurer to take over one of the webinars in the pedagogy series that was planned prior to stepping into this role and this event is to be organized. The programming I've organized thus far includes a three-part Constituency Group readiness webinar series: 1) overview of Constituency Groups, 2) writing Constituency group bylaws, and 3) writing Constituency Groups' annual reports—the latter of which I had to cancel due to sickness but from which the National Office sent the PowerPoint I created based on the Constituency Group Leaders Handbook and NWSA bylaws to all those who registered. I also organized a town hall for members to ask questions, provide suggestions, and engage with members of the Governing Council and which turned into a discussion of current events and how NWSA can support our members. It is my hope to institutionalize both the Constituency Group webinar series and town halls, the latter of which I hope to host two times a year moving forward.

*Back to the Table of Contents*

## Lesbian Caucus Chair

*Submitted by Dominique C. Hill (2024-26)*

### Foundational Movements

- Conducted outreach to caucus members about elections and chairing the caucus.
- Solicited articles and publications members wrote and/or those they saw foundational within lesbian studies.
- Launched the caucus reading group in August by reading “I Am a Lesbian”: Black Queer Subjectivities in "The Watermelon Woman and Pariah” by Stephanie Andrea Allen.
- Organized a two-faculty review team for the Lesbian Caucus Award to ensure valuable feedback for the dissertation process and moving beyond into other publications.

### Growing Our Membership: From Seed to Branch

Between November 2025 and September 2026, our community has experienced commendable growth. Membership increased from **14** to **28 members**. I attribute this elevation in membership to increased caucus visibility, growing interest and engagement, as well as persistent outreach.

### Gathering with Purpose

- Hosted two Lesbian Caucus Office Hours–May and June 2026. ● Co-hosted with WOCC chair Dr. Stephanie Allen, “Keepin' Care and Courage at the Center,” a public conversation about leadership and leading NWSA caucuses with respect, care, and courage. The dialogue took place on June 1, 2026.

***Note**: Members should direct any questions and/or concerns to the Member Liaison (membersatlarge@nwsa.org) with “Annual Report” in the subject line.*

- We launched our caucus reading group in August 2025, at the request of a community member during the quarter 2 meeting and towards strengthening our community connection. We discussed a text written by one of 2 our very own, Dr. Stephanie Andrea Allen's piece ""I Am a Lesbian": Black Queer Subjectivities in The Watermelon Woman and Pariah."
- Held quarterly meetings on March 25, June 8, August 13, and October 8 of 2026.

## Elevating Our Work

- Supported graduate students in the caucus by meeting to discuss conceptual and analytical framings of their research as well as strategizing dissertation writing and work responsibilities balancing.
- Submitted a sponsored session proposal, "Wild Insight: Unarchiving Lesbian Wisdom" featuring four faculty and one newly minted graduate student from the caucus (bonus—*it was accepted)*.
- In the process of creating a quarter-based transitioning document for future chairs/co-chairs.

## Other Action and Contributions

As Caucus chair and a member of the GC, my work extends my responsibilities to the Lesbian Caucus. Some of other contributions I made this year include:

- As a member of the L&D committee, drafted and sent out personalized emails to Institutional Member representatives in gratitude for their membership and to alert them to upcoming elections.
- Met with nominated members to discuss current vision and responsibilities of NWSA.
- Served as proposal review co-chair (alongside Maria Rovito) for the "Wild Feminisms" subtheme for the Annual Conference, reviewing over 100 proposals.
- Co-facilitated the Constituency Group Readiness event with Victoria Reyes and Stephanie Andrea Allen on August 11th.
- Worked with Stephanie Andrea Allen and Maria Rovito (and later President Jessica Pabón and Senior Operations and Infrastructure Manager Courtney Carroll) to plan the catering for the annual conference.

## Challenges, Forecasting, and an Invitation

Through consistent watering, the Lesbian Caucus of NWSA is steadily growing in size. Our achievements in getting the Caucus back onto solid ground with respect to membership activity and policies and procedure are no small feat. In the face of attacks on our field, being perpetually human and financially under-resourced, we maintain our commitment to feminist ethics and practice.

Despite our growing membership numbers, we grapple with consistent engagement. For the

remainder of my term, I intend to complete my stated goals of firming up procedural protocol, adding resources to our community hub, and creating a transitionary document for the incoming chair, Dr. Jessica Pruett and future chairs.

Looking back to the start of my term in 2024 with 5 members, including myself, I am encouraged and deeply fulfilled. In two years, the Lesbian Caucus tripled membership, awarded two graduate students research awards, gave (some) scholars in Lesbian Studies their flowers, and strengthened connections within our community. With continued growth and deepened engagement from current and new members, we will continue to support our Caucus mission in alignment with the national organization.

*Back to the Table of Contents*

## Women of Color Caucus Chair

*Submitted by Stephanie Andrea Allen (2024-26)*

*As Chair of the Women of Color Caucus (WoCC), I have tried to continue the work that was started last year: to reinvigorate the Women of Color Caucus through active engagement and robust communication. While this year has been a bit more challenging, I am happy to report that the WoCC membership has continued to increase and that our engagement has remained steady throughout the year. What follows is a brief accounting of some of the WoCC's activities thus far.*

### WoCC Activities

- The WoCC chair participated in reviewing and providing feedback for the *Frontier*'s/NWSA article prize. This year, no prize was awarded; neither submission was deemed appropriate for the award. However, the *Frontier*'s journal editors have offered some support if the applicant with the most potential is willing to work towards submitting for publication.
- "Keepin' Care and Courage at the Center: A Conversation with The NWSA Lesbian and Women of Color Caucus Chairs." In this community conversation, held on June 1st, 2026, the WoCC Chair and Dominique C. Hill, Chair of the Lesbian Caucus, reflected on "what it means to lead with feminist praxis in our ever-changing and currently under attack field." Our conversation was generative and Dominique and the WoCC Chair plan to continue their work (possibly through co-writing an article) on Black feminist leadership in times of crisis.
    - Since April, and at the request of WoCC members, the WoCC chair has hosted *weekly virtual writing groups* on Wednesday evenings from 6-7:30 p.m.
    - The WoCC Chair worked to increase the holdings in our WoCC resource library. Publications were solicited from our members which were added to the library. The WoCC Chair has also ensured that up-to-date copies of the by-laws and other notes are included in the library.

### Women of Color Leadership Project (WoCLP)

- After carefully reviewing the applications, the WoCC Chair selected 10 applicants for this year's cohort, a diverse group of graduate students, independent scholars, activists, and faculty members. The WoCC Chair will facilitate this program at the annual conference in Atlanta.
- The WoCC chair solicited workshops from current NWSA members and created a full day of programming for the 2026 WoCLP cohort.

### Governing Council Activities

- As member of the Leadership and Development committee, the WoCC Chair attended several meetings, created questions for potential nominees, helped to facilitate new process by which we would meet with potential nominees BEFORE placing them on the ballot and asking said questions, and ensured that our process of verifying NWSA membership and engagement was met for all potential nominees.
- The WoCC Chair held the first quarter meeting on March 15th, and the second quarter meeting on July 23rd. The yearly business meeting will be held virtually ahead of the annual conference.
- The WoCC chair (along with Umme Al-wazedi) served as proposal review chair for the "Wild Feminisms" subtheme for the Annual Conference, reviewing 114 proposals. .
- The WoCC Chair helped to facilitate the Constituency Group Readiness event with Victoria Reyes and Dominique C. Hill on August 11th.
- The WoCC Chair organized the Governing Council book signing event to be held at the annual conference in November.
- The WoCC Chair (along with GC member Maria Rovito) drafted questions for and conducted the exit interview for former Executive Director Kristian Contreras. Stephanie and Maria plan to create a process for off-boarding GC members as well.
- The WoCC Chair met with Stina Soderling, Agnes Browning, and GC member Victoria Reyes to discuss NWSA support for graduate students in the form of helping them to revitalize the Graduate Student Caucus.
- The WoCC Chair worked with Dominique C. Hill and Maria Rovito (and later President Jessica Pabón and Senior Operations and Infrastructure Manager Courtney Carroll) to plan the catering for the annual conference.
- The WoCC chair met with the incoming WoCC Chair Kimberly Stanley to help facilitate a smooth transition into the WoCC Chair role.

*Moving forward, the WoCC remains committed to creating meaningful partnerships across NWSA to best support our members. While our resources are limited, we aim to do as much as we can to facilitate programs and events that meet the needs of our constituency group.*

*Back to the Table of Contents*

## National Office

*Submitted by Courtney Carroll*

***Note**: Members should direct any questions and/or concerns to the Member Liaison (membersatlarge@nwsa.org) with "Annual Report" in the subject line.*

## Personnel

Prior to July 1, 2026, the Association was anchored by a two-person full-time staff: the Executive Director and Operations and Infrastructure Manager. Now, the Association has one full-time staff member: the Senior Operations and Infrastructure Manager. Before her departure, Dr. Contreras worked with one Summer Fellow. In October, in preparation for our annual conference, we hired one temporary part-time Operations Assistant.

| Name | Title/Role | Tenure |
|---|---|---|
| Courtney Carroll | Senior Operations & Infrastructure Manager | 2020 - Present<br>*title and salary change in 2026* |
| Maria Ciarrocchi | Operations Assistant | October 2026 |
| Kristian Contreras | Executive Director | 2024 - June 30, 2026 |
| Paige Jones | NWSA Summer Fellow | Summer 2026 |

### NWSA By the Numbers

| | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Individual Members | 1,171 | 1,613 | 1,398 |
| Institutional Members | 56 | 98 | 112 |

**Data as of 10.22.26*

### Virtual Events

From November 2025 to the time of this report, we have hosted the following webinars:

- Feminist Stories That Heal Us: Returning to Our Voices
- The Writer's Nest (multiple sessions)
- Reframing The Discussion: Ten Truths About Sexual Assault and Child Sexual Abuse
- Navigating Constituency Group Annual Reports
- Creating and Updating Constituency Group Bylaws
- Constituency Group Information Session
- What Age Do You Want to Be? Feminist Pedagogy Across the Lifespan
- Trauma-Informed Pelvic Examinations: Consent and Care
- NWSA Community Space: A Conversation on Leadership Transitions with President Pabón

***Note**: Members should direct any questions and/or concerns to the Member Liaison (membersatlarge@nwsa.org) with "Annual Report" in the subject line.*

- Embracing Abortion Positivity
- Meet the Governing Council
- Keepin' Care and Courage at the Center | A Conversation With the NWSA Lesbian and WoC Caucuses
- The Missing Conversation: Feminism, Fertility Literacy, and Inclusive Pathways to Parenthood
- Unpacking Feminist Storytelling
- NWSA Town Hall Meeting
- Processing Pop-Up: Feminists Reckoning with César Chávez's History of Sexual Abuse
- Crip Love Letters
- Freedom to Learn and Teach | In Defense of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
- Transnational Feminist Pedagogies: Practical Applications for the GWST Classroom
- The Political Attack on Gender Studies: A Workshop on Defending Feminist Knowledge
- Seeding Critical Connections: A WGSS Community Support Space
- Sound Bath Healing Meditation with Sacred Sounds by Devon
- Keeping Feminism in Circulation

*Back to the Table of Contents*

# Governing Council Composition Task Force

Executive Summary Report
Authored by Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández, Ph.D. with committee-wide edits

## I. Introduction

The National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) is governed by a Governing Council (GC) composed of the Executive Committee, Members-at-Large, and the chairs/co-chairs of the Lesbian Caucus and the Women of Color Caucus. The GC serves as NWSA's board of directors and holds the authority and responsibilities set forth in the Association's Articles of Incorporation, bylaws, and other policy documents. As currently structured, the GC consists of 11 voting members — 4 officers, 4 elected Members-at-Large, and 3 ex-officio voting members (the Chair of Record for the Women of Color Caucus, the Chair of Record for the Lesbian Caucus, and the Immediate Past President) — each serving two-year terms, with the President serving an additional ex-officio year.

In January 2024, President Lewis introduced a two-year strategic plan, "Reconnect, Repair, Restore: A More Thoughtful, Transparent, and Trustworthy NWSA," developed after she conducted one-on-one meetings with each member of the Governing Council and the Interim Director in November and December 2023. In presenting the plan at the post-conference Governing Council meeting that fall, Lewis characterized NWSA as a progressive nonprofit that is nonetheless "an institution that deserves to be resisted" — arguing that even when the Association does excellent work, its members and leadership should welcome questions that push it to think carefully about who it claims to be and what it claims to do. Because the President holds ex officio status on every NWSA committee and chairs the Governing Council, Executive Committee, Membership Assembly, and national conference, Lewis framed that

self-scrutiny as beginning with her own role, while noting that advancing the plan would be a collaborative effort shared with the Governing Council and NWSA staff. Lewis described the plan as a living, collective, and comprehensive document — not an exhaustive one — and asked the Association to rally behind it. The Governing Council Composition Task Force, charged roughly six months later in July 2024, stands as one concrete outgrowth of that broader commitment to a more thoughtful, transparent, and trustworthy NWSA.

In July 2024, then-President Heidi R. Lewis charged a Governing Council Composition Task Force with developing a comprehensive plan to assess and propose transparency in NWSA governance moving forward. The task force's charge called for surveys and focus groups, culminating in an executive summary and supporting data that the membership would vote on at a Membership Assembly meeting. We use this document to also communicate a revised timeline to the membership transparently. Because data collection ran roughly a year beyond its planned window and past the originally anticipated 2025 Membership Assembly vote, we proactively explain this delay to the membership This executive summary and its recommendations could inform a vote.

This report presents that executive summary: the task force's membership, the process by which it designed and administered a membership-wide survey, the resulting data, an analysis of that data, and seven actionable recommendations for the current Governing Council.

This report was finalized during a leadership transition at NWSA. President Lewis's term concluded in November 2025, and the Association is now led by President Jessica N. Pabón (2025–2027) under a new two-year strategic plan, “An Invitation to a Collective Reorientation,” launched in March 2026. The task force’s findings and recommendations are offered to the current Governing Council as the continuation of the process President Lewis initiated.

## II. Task Force Membership

The task force was composed of the following members, drawn from institutions across the country, along with NWSA's President and Executive Director, who contributed official governance content to the survey.

| **Name** | **Institutional Affiliation Role / Contribution** |
|---|---|
| Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández | Northeastern University (Professor of English) Task Force Lead; process documentation; primary committee coordinator |
| Heidi R. Lewis | Colorado College; NWSA President (2023–2025)<br>Charged the task force; final review of governance content for the survey |
| Kristian Contreras | NWSA National Office (Executive Director) Provided official governance data for the survey preamble |
| Jaleesa Reed | Cornell University, College of Human Ecology Co-developed survey questions, metrics, and rating scales |

***Note**: Members should direct any questions and/or concerns to the Member Liaison (membersatlarge@nwsa.org) with “Annual Report” in the subject line.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Dana Bisignani | Not specified in source materials; Co-developed survey questions, metrics, and rating scales |
| Stina Soderling | Texas Woman's University; Coordinated shared Google Drive; managed survey distribution logistics; meeting logistics |
| Zakiya R. Adair, PhD<br><br>Letitia Price | The College of New Jersey (Director, Committee member; survey review and International Studies; Assoc. Professor, WGSS & African American Studies);<br><br>Ohio University Led survey data processing; feedback |
| Lisa Covington<br><br>Kinza Batool | Brown University Committee member; survey review and feedback<br><br>Northeastern University Committee member; survey review and feedback |
| Diane Harriford | Vassar College ********** |
| Qiana Cutts | Mississippi State University, College of Education; Wrote the survey's narrative preamble |

The task force lost one member's participation when their job at the campus Women's Center was closed.

# III. Process & Methodology

## A. Committee Meetings

The task force held six documented full-committee meetings — in November 2024, January 2025, on February 20, 2025, on March 11, 2025, and March 2, 2026, — in addition to ongoing asynchronous coordination by email and Doodle poll dating back to the task force's formation in July 2024. Meetings were conducted by Zoom and recorded for members unable to attend live.

## B. Steps Taken to Develop and Launch the Survey

1. The task force was charged (July 2024) by President Lewis to assess and propose transparency improvements to NWSA governance, with recommendations to be presented to the membership for a vote at a Membership Assembly meeting.

2. A work plan was established (November 2024) assigning responsibilities: Qiana Cutts to write the survey preamble; Diane Harriford to research historical NWSA governance review processes; Dana Bisignani and Jaleesa Reed to develop survey metrics, questions, and rating scales; Letitia Price to lead data processing; Stina Soderling to set up shared Google Drive infrastructure; and Nicole Guidotti-Hernández to document the committee's process as an appendix to the executive summary.

***Note**: Members should direct any questions and/or concerns to the Member Liaison (membersatlarge@nwsa.org) with "Annual Report" in the subject line.*

3. Bisignani and Reed drafted the initial survey questions (January 2025) after reviewing NWSA's bylaws, website, and strategic plan, and circulated the draft to the full committee for comment.

4. The committee met (late January 2025) to review and discuss the draft survey.

5. The committee met again (February 20, 2025) and established a process going forward: a 24-hour internal comment window before forwarding the survey to the President and Executive Director; governance content to be added by the President and Executive Director using a "less is more" approach; the narrative preamble to be added by Cutts once that governance content was in place; a volunteer proofread before release; and a target of distributing the survey to the full NWSA member community space and newsletter, pending final sign-off.

6. The committee met a third time (March 11, 2025) to finalize question wording on GC responsibilities and to reach consensus on disclosure language addressing the fact that the survey would launch shortly before a scheduled GC bylaws vote.

7. The committee approved, by reply-all, a transparency caveat stating that the concurrent April 11, 2025 GC bylaws vote — itself the product of a multi-year prior process — had no bearing on the survey or its outcome, and that the survey was strictly for data collection and executive-summary purposes.

8. The finalized survey was uploaded to NWSA's SurveyMonkey account and distributed to the full membership via the member community space and the NWSA newsletter beginning April 11–15, 2025, coinciding with the GC's bylaws vote.

9. No firm closing date was set at launch. In practice, response data show the survey remained open considerably longer (see Analysis).

10. Because of time-lapse and in consultation with President Pabón, the committee went forward without the focus-group phase. A future iteration of the task force could organize the focus-groups, for which 68.75% of survey respondents opted in

11. Guidotti-Hernández used data collection to work on the executive summary.

## IV. Survey Data

### Respondent Profile (n = 40)

Membership tenure was bimodal: 32.5% of respondents (13) had been NWSA members for 0–3 years, while 42.5% (17) had been members for 12+ years, with comparatively few in the middle tenure bands (17.5% at 4–7 years; 7.5% at 8–11 years). By institutional affiliation, respondents were concentrated at four-year institutions (57.5%), public universities/colleges (45.0%), and private universities (22.5%), with minimal representation from community colleges, technical/career colleges, and tribal colleges. Respondents were predominantly faculty (55.0%) or administrators/staff (37.5%). By race, 50.0% identified as White and 22.5% as African American/Black; by ethnicity (n = 37), 43.2% identified as European and 21.6% as Latina/e/o/x. By gender (n = 39), 76.9% identified as cisgender women. By sexual identity (n = 39), 35.9% identified as

heterosexual, 28.2% as bisexual, and 23.1% as queer. 35.9% of respondents (n = 39) identified as a person with a disability.

## Governance Awareness & Perceptions

Responses to governance perception statements were scored by SurveyMonkey on a 0–100 scale (higher indicates stronger agreement):

| Governance Perception Statement (0–100 average, n varies) Average Score n |
|---|
| I am aware of NWSA's governance structure. 63 / 100 35 |
| The current governance structure aligns with NWSA's mission. 56 / 100 34 |
| The current governance structure effectively represents the field. 52 / 100 33 |
| The current governance structure represents me as a professional. 50 / 100 29 |
| If interested, I know how to begin the process of serving on the GC. 55 / 100 31 |
| Serving on the GC is valuable for professional development. 72 / 100 35 |
| Serving on the GC is valuable for service. 76 / 100 34 |

## Governing Council Responsibilities (n = 33)

Respondents were asked which responsibilities should fall under the GC. Results, from strongest to weakest consensus:

| Should this fall under the Governing Council? (n = 33) % Yes | Count |
|---|---|
| Develops policy and takes action to preserve NWSA's mission/operations 90.9% | 30 |
| Proposes new projects to advance NWSA's wellbeing and mission 81.8%<br>Creates committees to advise the work of NWSA or the GC 78.8% Allocates resources appropriately 72.7% | 27<br>26<br>24 |
| Serves as the NWSA board of directors 69.7% | 23 |
| Sets fee policy for constituent groups 42.4% | 14 |
| Determines membership dues 60.6% | 20 |
| Appoints a member for membership concerns / conflict resolution 60.6% | 20 |
| Appoints and removes the Executive Director 57.6% | 19 |

## Transparency & Communication Channels

Respondents rated how much each channel helps them learn about NWSA's elections process and candidates (0–100 scale):

| Election/Governance Information Channel (0–100 avg.) Average Score n |
|---|
| Newsletter 70 / 100 31 |
| NWSA website 62 / 100 30 |
| Feel well informed overall about the elections process 58 / 100 30 |
| Social media 44 / 100 27 |
| Member Clicks forums 35 / 100 24 |

## Satisfaction with Current Governance Structure

| Satisfaction with Current Governance Structure (n = 32) | % Count |
|---|---|
| 5 – Very satisfied | 6.3% 2 |
| 4 – Satisfied | 28.1% 9 |
| 3 – Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | 34.4% 11 |
| 2 – Dissatisfied | 18.8% 6 |
| 1 – Very dissatisfied | 12.5% 4 |

## Degree of Engagement & Investment (n = 33)

The most common forms of engagement were reading NWSA emails (90.9%), receiving NWSA emails (78.8%), and visiting the NWSA website (75.8%). Attending the annual conference (69.7%) and caucus/committee/interest group meetings (63.6%) were also common. Posting to discussion forums (27.3%) and attending the Membership Assembly meeting specifically (39.4%) were the least common forms of engagement.

## Open-Ended Themes

• Several respondents questioned why only two of NWSA's more than 40 constituency groups (the Women of Color Caucus and the Lesbian Caucus) hold guaranteed ex-officio GC seats, asking whether caucuses and task forces should be represented differently.

• One respondent asked the task force to consult with members who were present when the Women's Centers Committee's GC representation was previously removed, suggesting unresolved history relevant to the current review.

• Respondents raised NWSA's transparency and communication around the closure of women's and gender centers as a related concern.[1]

• One respondent suggested formalizing mutual-support arrangements or shared task forces with peer organizations (e.g., ASA, NACCS, AASA, ISA) given shared political pressures facing the field.

• Several respondents described wanting to be more engaged but cited financial cost as a

barrier to participation.

### Focus Group Interest

68.75% of respondents (22 of 32) agreed to be contacted for a follow-up focus group, providing a substantial pool for the qualitative phase of the task force's work.

## V. Analysis

Interest in serving on the Governing Council outpaces confidence in the current pathway to service and in the structure's representativeness. Respondents rated service as valuable for professional development (72/100) and for service itself (76/100), yet rated their own confidence in how to begin the process of serving considerably lower (55/100), and rated the current structure's representation of them personally as a professional at the midpoint of the scale (50/100) — the lowest-scoring governance perception statement in the survey. This gap suggests that willingness to serve is not the limiting factor in broadening GC participation; a clearer, better-publicized pathway to service likely is.

Respondents did not treat all GC powers as equally core to the role. Near-consensus items — developing policy (90.9%), proposing new projects (81.8%), and creating advisory committees (78.8%) — were far more broadly endorsed than setting fee policy for constituent groups (42.4%) or appointing/removing the Executive Director (57.6%). This suggests the membership draws a distinction between the GC's mission-stewardship functions, which it strongly affirms, and some of its more administrative or personnel-related powers, which are more contested.

Communication channels are not interchangeable. The NWSA newsletter (70/100) meaningfully outperformed the website (62/100), social media (44/100), and Member Clicks forums (35/100) as a source of election and governance information. Given this gap, treating all channels as equally strategic risks underinvesting in the one channel members say works, while overinvesting in channels members report finding less useful.

Satisfaction with the current governance structure shows no consensus. Roughly equal shares of respondents reported being satisfied (34.4%), neutral (34.4%), and dissatisfied (31.3%) with the current structure. This even three-way split indicates a membership genuinely undecided rather than one leaning firmly toward the status quo or toward reform — which argues for the task force's recommendations being framed as options for membership deliberation rather than a foregone conclusion in either direction.

Several open-ended responses point toward a specific, longstanding equity question: with more than 40 constituency groups and only two holding guaranteed ex-officio GC seats, some members read the current structure as arbitrary or as reflecting decisions (such as the prior removal of the Women's Centers Committee's GC seat) that were never fully revisited with current membership. This is a substantive governance question the survey surfaced but cannot resolve on its own.

Two limitations are worth noting for how these findings should be used. First, the sample is small relative to NWSA's overall membership (n = 40 against a membership of roughly 2,350,

per the Association's published membership figures) and is skewed toward long-tenured, faculty, four-year-institution respondents — caution is warranted before generalizing to the full, more institutionally and professionally diverse membership. Second, the data collection window ran from April 11, 2025, and responses continued arriving as late as April 2026 — roughly a year beyond the 3–4-week window originally proposed. The gap between the intended and actual timeline is itself a transparency-relevant finding largely because we kept the survey open to accommodate members navigating end-of-semester demands. We planned committee check-ins which slipped between members' schedules, which shifted throughout the spring. We chose a fuller response pool over a faster close, which is the right trade-off for a report on transparency.

## VI. Conclusion

NWSA's own governance materials describe Governing Council members as needing to demonstrate “transformative, collaborative, and creative leadership” on behalf of the field. The data gathered by this task force show a membership that broadly affirms that standard in principle — members value GC service, largely endorse the GC's core mission-stewardship responsibilities, and remain engaged through the channels that work best for them — while also surfacing real, addressable gaps: an unclear path to service, a structure that only about half of respondents feel represents them personally, uneven confidence in how communication channels are used, and unresolved historical questions about which constituency groups hold guaranteed representation.

This task force was charged in July 2024 under President Lewis's administration and completed its survey-based data collection under President Pabón's. That transition does not diminish the relevance of these findings; if anything, it makes a clear, timely handoff more important. The recommendations below are offered as the next concrete step in the process the membership was told to expect: a data-informed basis for the Governing Council's deliberation and, ultimately, a membership vote.

## VII. Recommendations

**1. Revisit constituency-group representation on the GC.** Formally review whether the current ex-officio structure (limited to the Women of Color Caucus and Lesbian Caucus) should be expanded or supplemented — for example, through rotating seats or formal liaison roles — given that NWSA now supports more than 40 constituency groups. As part of this review, the GC should specifically revisit and document the history of the Women's Centers Committee's prior GC representation, as multiple respondents referenced this directly.

**2. Invest in the newsletter as the primary governance communication channel.** Given the newsletter's clear performance advantage (70/100) over social media (44/100) and Member Clicks forums (35/100), the GC and National Office should prioritize newsletter-based communication for elections and governance updates, and either redesign or scale back reliance on underperforming channels rather than treating all channels as equally effective.

**3. Publish a clear, step-by-step pathway to GC service.** Create and widely distribute a

concrete guide to running for or being appointed to the GC, paired with a mentorship or shadowing opportunity tied to the elections cycle. This directly addresses the gap between members' high valuation of service (72–76/100) and their low confidence in how to begin (55/100).

**4. Using the survey data as a benchmark for future organizational transparency measures.** 68.75% of survey respondents opted into follow-up focus groups, and several open-ended themes — constituency-group representation, communication about women's, LGBTIQ+, and gender center closures, and inter-organizational collaboration — need qualitative follow-up the survey alone cannot resolve. The GC can move forward with focus groups for the 2026 convention and incorporate the findings if relevant to bylaws amendments.

**5. Establish a formal mechanism for membership-wide voting beyond annual elections.** Survey respondents showed markedly less consensus on some of the GC's most consequential powers — setting fee policy for constituent groups (42.4% agreement) and determining membership dues (60.6%) — than on its mission-stewardship functions (developing policy, 90.9%). Members want a direct voice on major financial and structural decisions, not just a vote in annual officer elections. The GC should establish a standing process for membership-wide votes on defined categories of major decisions — for example, dues or fee changes, bylaws amendments, and significant shifts in governance structure — modeled on the same Membership Assembly vote this task force's own recommendations are set to receive. Direct participation must become a standard feature of NWSA governance rather than an annual exception.

**6. Diversify outreach for future governance surveys**

The current sample is heavily skewed toward four-year, public/private university faculty, with almost no respondents from community colleges, technical/career colleges, or tribal colleges — despite NWSA having a dedicated Community College Caucus. At n=40 out of ~2,350 members (~1.7%), this isn't just a limitation to note; it's something the GC could actively fix before the next data-collection effort with targeted outreach to underrepresented institutional types.

**7. One open-ended response specifically cited cost as the reason for not engaging more**

Given how central financial access is to who can even respond to a survey like this one, let alone serve on the GC or attend the conference, this points to a concrete item: have the GC assess whether fee waivers, sliding-scale dues, or travel/registration scholarships tied to GC service would measurably change who can participate in governance.

## NWSA Name Task Force MEMORANDUM

**TO:** NWSA Governing Council
**FROM:** NWSA Name Task Force
**DATE:** September 3, 2026
**SUBJECT:** Survey Results & Recommendation Options for Organizational Name Change

***Note**: Members should direct any questions and/or concerns to the Member Liaison (membersatlarge@nwsa.org) with "Annual Report" in the subject line.*

Following discussions about whether "National Women's Studies Association" (NWSA) still fits who we are and what we do, we surveyed approximately 70 members to get a clearer picture of where the field stands.

The feedback shows a deeply invested membership, but no single consensus. While almost everyone agrees the field's intellectual scope has grown far beyond traditional "Women's Studies," members are split on how—or even if—we should change our name. The main debate comes down to balancing institutional alignment and inclusion against preserving our political roots and history in a hostile political climate.

Below is a summary of what we learned and three suggested paths forward for GC review.

## 1. What We Heard from Members

### The Current Name

- **Historical Significance:** A large segment of members wants to keep the name because it honors the original struggle to establish women's studies as a discipline.
- **Outdated Scope:** On the other hand, many junior scholars, trans, nonbinary, and genderqueer respondents noted that "Women's Studies" feels restrictive. It makes it harder for researchers working in trans studies, queer theory, critical race theory, or disability studies to see themselves in the organization.
- **Disconnect with Academic Departments:** Most university programs have already shifted away from "Women's Studies" to titles like "Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies" (WGSS) or "Feminist Studies." Because of this, our name can feel disconnected from our institutional partners.
- **The Term "National":** Several respondents pointed out that "National" frames the group around the U.S. nation-state, which conflicts with our emphasis on transnational and decolonial scholarship.

### Core Arguments & Concerns

- **Arguments for a change:** It creates a more welcoming space for nonbinary, trans, and queer scholars; brings us in line with current department titles; and reflects our broader political commitments.
- **Arguments against a change:** Removing "women" might look like we are stepping back from fighting sexism and misogyny, especially during a time of heightened political attacks on the field. Others worried about losing brand recognition, erasing our history, or ending up with an unwieldy title.

### 2. Name Suggestions from the Survey

Participants offered a wide range of alternatives, which fell into four main categories:

1. **Departmental Alignment:** *National Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Association (NWGSSA)* or *National Women's and Gender Studies Association (NWGSA)*

2. **Framework-Based:** *National Feminist Studies Association (NFSA)* or *Association for Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*
3. **Broad Focus:** *National Gender Studies Association (NGSA)* or *Transnational Gender Studies Association*
4. **Creative Acronyms:** *WRIGS (Women, Race, Indigeneity, Gender, and Sexuality)* or *IGNITE (International Network for Gender, Inquiry, Theory & Ethics)*

**3. Strategic Options for the Board**

Given how divided the membership is, forcing a full name change immediately could cause significant friction. We recommend considering three potential approaches:

**Option 1: Full Name Change (Rebrand)**

- **Action:** Change our legal and public name to something like the *National Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Association (NWGSSA)* or *National Feminist Studies Association*.
- **Trade-offs:** Resolves the inclusivity issue and matches current department titles, but carries real costs (legal, administrative, web domains) and risks pushback from members concerned about losing our historical focus or acronym.

**Option 2: Hybrid Approach (Keep Core Name + Add Tagline)**

- **Action:** Keep *National Women's Studies Association (NWSA)* as our legal name and primary identifier, but officially pair it with an explicit tagline across our site and materials (e.g., *"NWSA: An Association for Intersectional Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies"*).
- **Trade-offs:** Low-cost and low-risk. Protects our history and brand recognition while clarifying that our scope goes beyond traditional definitions of "women's studies." Some members, however, may feel a tagline doesn't go far enough.

**Option 3: Reaffirm Mission without Changing the Name**

- **Action:** Keep the current name as-is. Issue a clear statement explaining why keeping "Women's Studies" is politically important right now, while continuing to ensure our conference programming, caucuses, and leadership reflect the full breadth of the field.
- **Trade-offs:** Avoids rebranding logistics and stands firm on our history, but does not solve the disconnect felt by trans/nonbinary scholars or WGSS departments.

**Recommended Next Steps**

1. Reserve 45 minutes at the upcoming GC to review these options and agree on a direction.
2. If Option 1 or 2 is preferred, host town halls at the next annual conference to present this data to members and gather feedback before drafting any by-laws amendments.

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