

Melissa Toledo-Ontiveros, MA,
MCJ, MPA
Responses to questions for the
2024 Executive Board
Candidates

1) What unique skills or perspective will I bring to the Executive Board if elected?

Based on my extensive experience in public health, advocacy, and leadership, I bring several unique skills and perspectives to the American Public Health Association (APHA) Executive Board:

1. **Leadership in Public Health and Policy:** With years of experience as the President of the New Mexico Public Health Association and my service on several APHA boards, I offer a strong background in strategic planning, community engagement, and public health leadership. I have successfully led initiatives and coalitions focused on policy change, funding strategies, and program implementation at local and state levels.
2. **Advocacy for Health Equity and Climate Justice:** My work on the APHA Climate and Health Equity Board has equipped me with a nuanced understanding of the intersection between climate and health, and the policies necessary to address these challenges. My advocacy for whole-family approaches and support for marginalized communities demonstrates My commitment to equity and inclusive strategies.
3. **Cross-Sector and Grassroots Experience:** Having chaired countywide coalitions, managed COVID-19 financial aid programs, and led affordable housing initiatives, I bring a valuable ability to navigate diverse stakeholder groups and connect community needs to broader policy solutions. This grassroots experience allows me to ground APHA's work in lived realities and practical solutions.
4. **Strategic and Adaptive Leadership:** Serving as the Director of Thriving Families at Community Action Agency (a Nationwide nonprofit organization) and successfully securing multi-million-dollar grants during the pandemic highlights My ability to adapt, secure resources, and lead during crises. My experience running a State Senate race virtually against an incumbent further underscores My strategic thinking and resilience.
5. **Inclusive and Trust-Driven Collaboration:** I've conducted virtual groups fostering gender and racial justice, engaged philanthropists, and facilitated resilience CoPs, showcasing My skill in building trust and navigating complex conversations. My emphasis on collaboration, healing, and shared goals would help APHA advance its mission through inclusive and trust-driven leadership.

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These experiences and perspectives uniquely position me to contribute to APHA's Executive Board by integrating public health, policy, equity, and advocacy to drive meaningful change and support the organization's broader vision.

2) Please suggest how APHA can increase the growth, retention of members and value of membership to current and prospective members including affiliates and student members.

To increase the growth, retention, and value of APHA membership for current and prospective members, including affiliates and student members, APHA should focus on a multi-tiered approach that emphasizes engagement, inclusivity, mentorship, and tangible benefits. Below are some strategies:

1. Enhanced Value Proposition for Members

- ***Expand Access to Resources:*** Offer more tailored content such as toolkits, policy briefs, continuing education, and research updates that members can directly use in their professional and academic pursuits.
- ***Create More Member-Exclusive Opportunities:*** Include special events, workshops, and webinars only available to members, focusing on emerging public health topics and leadership skills.
- ***Tiered Membership Benefits:*** Develop unique benefits for different member types (students, early career professionals, seasoned professionals) to provide value that aligns with their specific needs and career stages.

2. Strengthened Engagement and Networking Opportunities

- ***Enhance virtual and In-Person Engagement:*** Organize more interactive online forums, networking sessions, and regional meetups to facilitate knowledge sharing and community building among members.
- ***Establish Peer Learning Circles:*** Create small groups for peer-to-peer learning and support, segmented by professional interests, geographic regions, or career stages, where members can discuss common challenges and share best practices.
- ***Facilitate Cross-Affiliate Collaboration:*** Encourage joint programming between affiliates and sections to deepen relationships, increase interdisciplinary approaches, and promote engagement across different sectors.

3. Tailored Support for Affiliates

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- ***Affiliate Leadership Academy:*** Launch an academy to build the capacity of affiliate leaders, offering training, resources, and coaching on strategic planning, member engagement, and advocacy.
- ***Affiliate Innovation Grants:*** Establish small grants to support innovative programs and projects within affiliates, which showcase their impact and increase visibility among members and prospective members.
- ***Affiliate Spotlights and Storytelling:*** Regularly feature affiliate successes in newsletters, webinars, and national meetings to highlight their unique contributions and build a sense of shared purpose across the organization.

4. Focused Support for Student and Early Career Members

- ***Structured Mentorship Program:*** Establish a mentorship program pairing students and early-career professionals with seasoned APHA members, including access to a structured curriculum, regular check-ins, and career guidance.
- ***Student Research and Leadership Opportunities:*** Offer more opportunities for students to present research, lead initiatives, and contribute to APHA policy development, enhancing the visibility of their contributions.
- ***Early Career Grants and Scholarships:*** Increase the number of scholarships and small grants available for students and early-career professionals to support attendance at APHA conferences or participation in research projects.

5. Enhanced Communication and Engagement Strategy

- ***Personalized Member Journeys:*** Use digital tools to create a personalized onboarding and engagement experience for new and current members, with tailored recommendations for events, resources, and professional development based on their interests.
- ***Expand Social Media Engagement:*** Increase visibility and outreach through targeted social media campaigns that showcase member achievements, share critical updates, and highlight the impact of public health work.
- ***Leverage Storytelling:*** Use storytelling to illustrate the real-world impact of APHA's work, highlighting diverse member stories to build a sense of pride and connection among members.

6. Strengthened Professional Development Pathways

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- ***Career Advancement Programs:*** Offer career coaching, skill-building workshops, and leadership development tailored to public health professionals at all stages, with a focus on the competencies needed for today’s public health challenges.
- ***Certification and Training Opportunities:*** Develop APHA-specific certifications or partner with other organizations to offer discounted training and certification opportunities that members value in their career growth.

By responding to the needs and motivations of each member group, APHA can improve the overall experience of its members, cultivate a stronger sense of belonging, and highlight the real benefits of joining the APHA community. This approach will not only boost membership growth and retention but also reinforce the long-term sustainability of APHA’s mission and its impact.