

AFTE Committee Report

2006 Annual Report

Committee Name: **Assessment of Associate Membership, Ad Hoc Committee**

Date of Report: 5-25-06

Reporting Person: Cara Gomes

Membership

Chair: Cara Gomes (Sacramento County Laboratory)

Members: Carl Rone (Philadelphia Police Department), William Wheatley (New Jersey State Police) and Deborah Chaklos (Allegheny County Coroner's Office).

Committee members will be attending the Business Meeting during the 2006 Annual Seminar and will be available to present a summary of our report.

Updates

With permission from the President, our committee would like to modify and update its purpose statement to the following:

This committee is charged with exploring the feasibility of adding a new associate level of membership to the Association. This level of membership would target those individuals who are currently employed in the firearms and/or toolmark-related field but who are not currently eligible for membership under the Association's current membership levels. This class would include, but is not limited to, individuals employed as IBIS technicians.

Editor Matthew Noedel was notified of our committee's current membership so that the AFTE Newsletter could be updated.

Committee Survey

Since the mid-year meeting our committee members have surveyed forensic laboratories and law enforcement agencies throughout the country to gain an insight into the types of individuals who work in the firearms and/or toolmark-related field but who are not currently eligible for AFTE membership. The questions we asked about these individuals included their training and experience, job duties and approximate time spent doing these duties, the level of turnover, and if these positions progressed to a firearm/toolmark examiner position. As expected, most individuals that fit into this class were effectively employed as IBIS technicians. This committee found no consistency in the level of education (requirements varied from a high school diploma to a 4-year college degree) or the level of training and experience (with the exception of the ATF-mandated FTI training required to operate IBIS). This committee also found variation in the duties and the time devoted to firearm/toolmark-related examinations, the level of turnover, and whether or not these individuals progressed to firearm/toolmark examiners.

Even though there was great variation in the types of individuals, this committee believes that it would be feasible to create an associate level of membership within the Association for these individuals.

Proposed Limits of the Associate Member Class

This membership level would be separate and distinct from any other level of membership within the Association and would not progress to any other membership level. If an associate member later met the requirements for any other membership level, they would be required to follow the appropriate application process. Additional restrictions this committee recommends for the associate membership level include the following: these individuals cannot vote, hold elected office, serve as committee chairpersons, or serve on any committee that already has an associate member.

Naturally, there are concerns about the level of qualifications necessary to become an associate member. This committee will work with the By-Laws Committee in an effort to draft by-law suggestions to ensure that only appropriate individuals are accepted into this membership class. Based on the results of our agency/laboratory survey, we recommend that the Association limit membership to those individuals who are employed in a forensic science-related occupation in a full-time, permanent capacity AND must “derive a substantial majority of their income from actively examining and evaluating firearms and related materials and/or toolmarks” (wording taken from current by-laws). The integrity of this membership level and its members could be ensured with the proper screening of any prospective member during the application process. The Association could also require a periodic review of associate members to ensure they still qualify for membership by verifying their employment status and job duties every 3 or 5 years.

Precedent of Other Forensic-Related Associations

Most forensic-related associations have an associate/affiliate membership level. However, in most of these organizations this membership level is equivalent to the AFTE Provisional membership level or is designated for college students. Currently, the California Association of Criminalists (CAC) is proposing a by-laws change to allow an individual to become an Affiliate member if they are an “... intern, laboratory technician, or volunteer employed in a forensic science laboratory...”. Basically, there is precedent for this type of membership, however, not necessarily in the exact capacity we have suggested here.

Overall Assessment

Although there are both benefits and negatives, our committee generally favors adding an associate membership level to the Association.

As stated in the previously submitted mid-year report, the potential benefits include the following:

- Enhancing the professionalism, skills, knowledge, and resources available to those individuals who perform examinations that potentially impact examinations performed by firearms/toolmark examiners

- Contributions to the organization, which include serving on committees, submitting articles to the journal, and presenting at seminars

- Fostering the “... exchange of information, methods, development of standards, and research” (as stated in the preamble to this organization) for individuals who work in the firearm/toolmark-related field but who do not currently qualify for membership

As stated in the mid-year report, the possible negatives include the following:

Changing the historical precedent of limiting membership to individuals who perform microscopic examinations/identifications

Changing to the structure of the organization and adapting to these changes

The potential for associate members to misuse their membership status within the Association to overstate their qualifications

Timeline

It is the intent of this committee to have a comprehensive proposal before the voting membership at the 2007 annual seminar. To this end, we will draft a sample associate membership application and will work with the By-Laws Committee to draft suggestions for proposed by-law changes. Before the 2007 seminar, this committee would like to introduce this topic to the membership via the AFTE website and newsletter, which will provide the current membership a forum to provide feedback.

If the associate membership level is approved by the voting membership, it would be this committee's intent to oversee the implementation process. In conjunction with the Membership Committee, our committee members could be charged with reviewing the applications of these individuals. Our committee's involvement could be phased out, depending on the volume of applications initially received and the volume of membership applications received on an ongoing basis.